

FYODOR MIKHAILOVICH DOSTOYEVSKY

POOR FOLK



Oh, those storytellers! They can't rest content with writing something useful, agreeable, palatable – they have to dig up all the earth's most cherished secrets!... I'd forbid them to write, that's what I'd do! I mean, have you ever known the like? A man reads... and finds himself reflecting – and before he knows where he is, all kinds of rubbish come into his head. I'd forbid them to write, truly I would; forbid them to write altogether!*

Prince V. F. Odojevsky

April 8

My precious Varvara Alekseyevna.

Yesterday I was happy – inordinately, impossibly happy! For once in your life, you stubborn girl, you have done as I asked. In the evening, at about eight, I woke up (you know, little mother, how I like to sleep for an hour or two after the completion of my duties). I had found a candle and some paper, and was sharpening my pen, when suddenly I happened to raise my eyes – and I will tell you that my heart fairly gave a leap! So you had guessed, after all, what it was my poor heart desired! I saw that one tiny corner of the curtain at your window had been pulled up and hitched onto the pot of balsams, precisely, oh, precisely in the way I had hinted you might do it when we met that time; I at once fancied that I saw your little face at the window for a moment, that you were looking down at me from your little room, that you were thinking about me. And oh, my little dove, how disappointed I was when I simply could not discern your charming little face properly! There was a time, little mother, when I, too, had good eyesight. Age is no joke, my darling! Even now my eyes seem to swim all the time; you do a bit of work of an evening, write a bit, and the next morning your eyes are all red, with the tears streaming down your face so you're ashamed to be seen by strangers. But anyway, in my imagination your smile fairly shone, my little angel – your kind, affectionate little smile and in my heart I had exactly the same sensation as that time I kissed you, Varenka, do you remember, my little angel? Do you know, my little dove, I even fancied that I saw you wag your finger at me up there! Did you, you mischievous girl? Please give me a detailed account of all this in your letter without fail. Well, what do you think of our little arrangement concerning your curtain, Varenka? It's charming, don't you think? Whatever I am doing – sitting at work, going to bed or waking up, I know that you are up there thinking about me, remembering me, and are yourself well and in good spirits. If you've lowered the curtain, that means: 'Good night, Makar Alekseyevich, it's bedtime!' If you've raised it, that means: 'Good morning, Makar Alekseyevich, did you sleep well?' or 'How are you today, Makar Alekseyevich? As for myself, thanks be to the Creator, I am well and happy!' Do you see, my little darling, what a skilful arrangement this is? You don't even need to write me letters! It's clever, isn't it? And what's more it was my idea. I'm rather good at these things, Varvara Alekseyevna, don't you agree?

I am able to report to you, Varvara Alekseyevna, my little mother, that last night, contrary to expectation, I slept in regular order and am accordingly most satisfied; it is always difficult to sleep in new lodgings one has just moved into; there is always something that is not quite right. I rose this morning as fresh as a daisy – happy and cheerful! What a wonderful morning it was, my dear. Our window had been opened; the sun was shining, the birds were chirruping, the

scents of spring were wafting on the air, and all nature was wakening to life – well, and everything else was likewise in corresponding manner; everything was in order, spring-fashion. I even had some rather nice dreams today, and they were all about you, Varenka. I compared you to a bird of the air, made for the delight of human beings and as an ornament for nature. It suddenly occurred to me, Varenka, that we human beings who live in care and trouble ought to envy the carefree and innocent happiness of the birds of the air – well, and so on, and so forth; i.e., I continued to make similar far-fetched comparisons. I have a book here, Varenka, which says the same sort of thing – all described in the greatest detail. I am writing this to you, little mother, because I have so many different dreams. And also because it's spring now: one's thoughts are pleasant, witty, fanciful, and one has such tender dreams; everything bears a rosy tinge. That's why I've written all this; though in fact I got it all out of my book. There the author displays the same desire in verses, and writes:

Why am I not a bird, a bird of prey?

Well, and so on, etcetera. There are various other thoughts in it, but God go with them. Now tell me, where were you going to this morning, Varvara Alekseyevna? I had not yet set off for the office, yet there you were, just like a bird in springtime, fluttering out of your room and across the yard, so small and sprightly. How happy it made me to see you! Oh, Varenka, Varenka, you mustn't be sad; tears will not help your sorrow; I know this, my little mother, I know it by experience. You are comfortable now, and your health has improved a little. Well, how is your Fedora? Oh, what a kindly woman she is! Will you write to me, Varenka, and tell me how you are getting along with her now and whether you are happy with everything? It's true that Fedora's a bit grumpy sometimes; but don't you pay any attention to that, Varenka. God be with her! She's such a kind one.

I have already written to you about the Teresa we have here – also a kind and reliable woman. And there was I getting so worried about our letters. How would they ever be delivered? And then, to our good fortune, the Lord sent us Teresa. She is a kind, meek, gentle woman. But our landlady is simply without mercy. She wears Teresa out with work as though she were an old rag.

My, what a slum I have landed in, Varvara Alekseyevna! Well, it's a lodging house! Before I used to live like a real hermit, you remember – peacefully, quietly; you could hear a pin drop. Here, on the other hand, there is nothing but noise, shouting, uproar! But then of course you don't know how everything is arranged here. Imagine, if you will, a long corridor, utterly dark and filthy. To your right there is a blank wall, and to your left nothing but doors and doors, like numbered hotel rooms, stretching away in a row. Well, these are for rent, and behind each number there is one little room; people live in them in twos or in threes. Don't expect things to be tidy – it's a proper Noah's ark! However, the people seem all right: they're all educated, learned folk. There's a civil servant (he works in the literary department somewhere), a well-read man: he talks about Homer, Brambeus,* and various other of those authors of theirs, he talks about everything – a clever man! There are two officers who are forever playing cards. There's a naval warrant-officer; and an Englishman who's a teacher. Just wait, and I shall amuse you, little mother; in my next letter I will describe them satirically, i.e. tell you what they are like in every detail. Our landlady is a very small and very dirty old woman – all day long she goes about in her slippers and dressing-gown, and all day long she shouts at Teresa. I live in the kitchen, or rather it would be more correct to put it this way: right next door to the kitchen here there is a room (I should, perhaps, tell you that our kitchen is clean, light and excellently appointed), a small room, a modest little corner... i.e. to put it even better, the kitchen has three windows, and I have a partition that runs parallel with the transverse wall, making as it were another room, a supernumerary one; it is spacious and comfortable, there is a window, and everything – all conveniences, in fact. Well, that is my little corner. So, little mother, don't you go away with the idea that I'm hiding something and that there's more to it than what I've described; don't say to yourself: 'but it's a kitchen!' – it's perfectly true that I live in the kitchen, behind a partition, but that doesn't matter; I live apart from everyone, so-so, on the quiet. I have provided myself with a bed, a table, a chest of drawers and a couple of chairs, and have hung up an icon. It is true

that there are better – possibly even much better – lodgings to be found; but convenience is what matters. And indeed I have done all this for the sake of my own convenience, and you must not think that it has been for any other purpose. Your window is opposite, across the yard; the yard is narrow, and one sees you passing – it is all more cheerful for a hapless fellow like myself, and it's cheaper, too. The lowliest room in our house here, with board, costs thirty-five paper rubles* a month. That's more than I can afford! But my place costs me only seven paper rubles, plus five silver rubles for board: that makes a total of twenty-four and a half, whereas before I was paying around thirty, and had to go without a good many things accordingly; I didn't even drink tea regularly, yet now I save enough to be able to afford both tea and sugar. You know, my darling, it is rather embarrassing not to be able to afford to drink tea; the people here are all well-off, so one feels embarrassed. Varenka, one drinks tea for the sake of others, for form's sake, in order to keep up appearances; for myself I couldn't care less, I'm not fussy. Look at it like this: one needs something for ready cash, something for boots and something for clothes – do you think that leaves much over? It all has to come out of my salary. But I don't complain and am satisfied. It is sufficient. It has been sufficient for several years now; there is also the occasional perk. Well, goodbye, my little angel. I have bought a couple of pots of balsam and a potted geranium at that place – they didn't cost much. Are you fond of mignonette? They have mignonette, too. Do write and tell me; yes, you know, write as fully as you can. But don't get any false ideas, little mother, and don't worry about my having taken a room such as this. I say it again: it was convenience that made me do it, and convenience alone was what tempted me. After all, my dear, I am saving money, I am setting money aside; I have quite a tidy little sum. Don't get the notion that I am such a meek soul that a fly could knock me over. No, little mother, I'm a bright fellow, and I possess a strength of character fitting in one whose soul is resolute and untroubled. Goodbye, my little angel! I have written you nearly two pages, and I ought to have set off for work long ago. I kiss your fingers, little mother, and remain,

Your most humble servant and most faithful friend,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN*

PS I ask you only one thing: please reply to me as fully as possible, my angel. With this letter I am sending you a pound of sweets; so eat them to your heart's content, and for heaven's sake do not worry about me or bear me any ill-will. Well, so goodbye then, little mother.

April 8

Makar Alekseyevich, Sir,

Do you know that you have at last forced me into a quarrel with you? Upon my word, good Makar Alekseyevich, I find it hard to accept your presents. I know what they cost you, what deprivations and denials to yourself of the very necessities of life they involve. How many times have I told you that I need nothing, nothing at all; that I have not the wherewithal to repay you for the good deeds with which you have showered me to date. And why these pots of flowers? I mean, the balsams are all right, but why the geranium? I have only to utter one unguarded word, as for example about that geranium, and immediately you go out and buy it; yet I am sure it was expensive, was it not? What wonderful flowers it has! Crimson, like little crosses. Wherever did you get such a pretty geranium? I have put it in the centre of the window, where it may best be seen; I shall put a bench on the floor and place the rest of the flowers on the bench; just wait until I, too, grow rich! Fedora dotes upon them; our room is now like paradise – so clean and bright! But listen – why sweets as well? Indeed, I guessed at once from your letter that all was not quite right with you – all those bits about paradise, and spring, and scents wafting, and birds chirping. What's this, I thought, it's poetry, isn't it? It's true, you know: all your letter lacks is a little poetry, Makar Alekseyevich! All the rest is there: the tender feelings, the rosy-tinted dreams! About the curtain – I never gave it any thought; I expect it must have got hitched up of itself when I was moving the pots of flowers; well I never!

Oh, Makar Alekseyevich! Whatever you say, however much you calculate your profits in order to deceive me, in order to prove that they are all spent on you alone, you will not deceive me and will not succeed in concealing anything from me. You are obviously depriving yourself of necessities for my sake. Whatever were you thinking of, for example, when you rented such a room? I mean, others are disturbing you, harrassing you; you're cramped and uncomfortable. You like seclusion, yet here you have heaven knows what all around you! Yet you could live much better than this, judging by your salary. Fedora says the way you used to live was better by far. Have you really spent all your life like this, in solitude, in hardship and joylessness, without a friendly word, renting corners from strangers? Oh, my good friend, how sorry I am for you! At least look after yourself, Makar Alekseyevich! You say that your eyes are growing weak – then do not write by candlelight; why write? I am sure that your devotion to your duty is already well known to your superiors.

Once again I beg you: please do not spend so much money on me. I know that you love me, but you are not well off... I also rose this morning in a cheerful frame of mind. I was so pleased; Fedora has been working for ages, and has managed to get me some work, too. I was so happy; I just slipped out to buy the silk, and then settled down to work. All morning my mood was as light as air, I felt in such good spirits! But now all my thoughts are black and sad again; my heart has done nothing but pine away.

Oh, what is to become of me, what will be my fate? The worst of it is that I am in a state of such uncertainty, that I have no future, that I cannot even guess what will become of me. I am afraid to look back, too. There is such misery there that its mere recollection is enough to make my heart tear at the seams.

Darkness is falling. I must be getting on with my work. There is much I should like to have written to you about, but I have no time – the work must be completed by a specified date. I must hurry. Of course I agree that letters are a good thing; they make life less tedious. But why do you never come to see us? Why, Makar Alekseyevich? It's not far for you to come, now, and you must occasionally have some free time. Do come and see us! I saw your Teresa. She looks so sickly; I felt sorry for her and gave her twenty copecks. Oh yes, I nearly forgot: you must write to me as fully as possible about all the details of your daily life and surroundings. What sort of people do you have around you, and do you get along with them? I very much want to know about all that. See that you do it, now, and write to me. Today I will hitch up a corner of the curtain intentionally. Go to bed a bit earlier; last night I saw your candle was lit until midnight. Well, goodbye. Today I feel nothing but anguish, tedium and sadness. It is simply that kind of a day! Goodbye.

Yours,

VARVARA DOBROSELOVA *

April 8

Varvara Alekseyevna, Madam,

Yes, my darling, yes, my dear, it seems that this is the kind of day that has fallen to my miserable lot! Yes; you have been poking fun at me, an old man, Varvara Alekseyevna! It is, however, my own fault, entirely my own fault. In one's old age, with only a wisp of hair left on one's head, one should not embark on amours and dubious ventures... And I will add this, little mother: man is sometimes a strange creature, very strange. And saints above! He sometimes really gets carried away by the things he talks about! And what comes of that, what follows from it? Absolutely nothing follows from it, and what comes of it is such rubbish that the Lord preserve us from it! I am not angry, little mother; it is simply that it is very annoying to remember it all, annoying to think that I wrote such fanciful, stupid things to you. And I went to the office today such a strutting dandy, too; there was such a radiance in my heart. For no good reason I felt in a holiday mood; I felt cheerful! I set to work on my papers with zeal – but what came of that? When I looked around me a bit later, everything was just the same as before – grey and dingy. The same blotches of ink, the same desks and papers, and I, too,

the same; as I had been, so exactly had I remained – so what had been the point of my flight on Pegasus? And what had been the cause of it all? The glimmer of sunshine and the bit of blue sky there had been? Was that it? And what kind of scents could there have been, when goodness only knows what may be lurking beneath our windows! All that was evidently the product of my foolish imaginings. After all, it does sometimes happen that a person goes astray in his feelings and writes down nonsense. It is caused by nothing other than excessive, stupid warmth of heart. I did not walk, but sooner dragged myself home; I had a headache, for no especial reason; it was all just one thing after another. (Perhaps the wind had given me a lumbago.) So overjoyed by the spring had I been that, like a fool, I had gone out in a thin overcoat. And you were wrong about my feelings, my darling! You interpreted their outpouring in quite the wrong way. It was fatherly affection that moved me, Varvara Alekseyevna, nothing but pure fatherly affection; for because of your bitter orphaned state, I take the place of a father to you; I say this from the bottom of my heart, in pure sincerity, as a relative. Whatever you may say, even though I am but distantly related to you, even though I am but a second cousin twice removed, none the less I am your relative, and am now your closest relative and protector; for there, where you had most right to seek protection and safety, you found treachery and insult. As regards the poetry, I must tell you, little mother, that it would not be seemly for a man of my age to engage in the art of writing poems. Poetry is nonsense! Boys are thrashed in our schools for writing verses nowadays... that is how it is, my darling.

Varvara Alekseyevna, why do you write to me of comfort, quiet and other such things? My little mother, I am not a grumbler, neither do I make demands. Never have I lived better than I am doing at present; why should I be fussy in my old age? I am fed, clothed, and shod; so why should I go getting fancy ideas? I am not a count! My father was not of noble birth, and he had to support his entire family on less than the salary I earn. I am no molly-coddle! Though if truth be told, everything was much better in my old apartment; there was a bit more space, little mother! Of course, the room I have now is nothing to complain about, and is even in some respects more cheerful, and possesses, if you will, more variety; I have no objection to that – yet I still miss my old place. We old – or rather elderly – folk grow accustomed to old things as to something that is a part of us. The room was a small one; the walls were... well, what can one say? The walls were as walls usually are; they were not important, yet remembering my past like this fills me with sadness... It is strange – I feel distressed, yet the memories are almost pleasant ones. In my memory even the bad things, the things that sometimes vexed me, are somehow cleansed of what was bad and appear to my mind in an attractive light. We lived a quiet life, Varenka, I and my old landlady, who is now no longer alive. I remember that old woman of mine with sadness now! She was a good soul, and did not ask much for the room I rented from her. She was forever knitting bedspreads out of scraps on the longest needles you have ever seen; that was all she ever did. We shared the cost of our light and fuel, and so we used to work at the same table. She had a young granddaughter, Masha; I remember her as just a little girl, but she must be about thirteen now. She was such a naughty little girl, always laughing, always making us laugh; and thus we lived together, the three of us. In the long winter evenings we would sit down at the round table, drink a little tea, and then set about our tasks. And to keep Masha entertained and prevent her from being too naughty, the old woman would start telling stories. And what stories they were! Not only a child, but a grown man with his head on his shoulders would listen to them with delight. Goodness! I remember that I would light my pipe and listen with such pleasure that I would forget what I was doing. And the child, our naughty little girl, would fall a-thinking, propping her rosy cheek in her hand, she would open her pretty little mouth and, if the story were the slightest bit scary, snuggle up as close as she possibly could to the old woman. It gave us such pleasure to watch her; and we would not notice that the candle had burned down, nor hear the intermittent howling of the gale and the raging of the snow outside. It was a good life we had, Varenka; and that way we lived for nigh on twenty years. But how I have been blabbing away! Such matters possibly hold no interest for you, and it is indeed not all that cheery for me to recall it, especially now that it is twilight. Teresa is busy with something, I have a headache and a bit of a backache and I have such strange thoughts, it's as if they were aching, too – I'm in a sorry state today, Varenka! What is this you write, my darling? How can I come and see you? My little dove, what would people say? I mean, I should have to cross the yard, the people here in the house would see me,

they would start asking questions – there would be gossip, rumours would circulate, people would give the whole business another meaning. No, my little angel, it would be better if I were to see you tomorrow at the all-night service; that would be more sensible and safer for us both. Little mother, do not judge me too severely for having written you a letter like this; having read it over, I can see that it is quite incoherent. I am an old, uneducated man, Varenka; I had no proper schooling when I was young, and now if I try to start studying afresh there is nothing that will go into my head. I confess, little mother, that I am no master of description, and I know without needing others to point it out to me and make fun of me that were I to try to write something a little more on the entertaining side, I should merely end up with a heap of rubbish. I saw you at your window today, saw you lowering the blind. Goodbye, goodbye, may God look after you!

Goodbye, Varvara Alekseyevna.

Your disinterested friend,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

PS My dear, I can't write satires about anyone now. I have grown too old, Varvara Alekseyevna, to show my teeth in vain! People would just laugh at me – as the Russian proverb says: 'The man who digs a pit for another will end up in it himself.'

April 9

Makar Alekseyevich, Sir,

Now then – are you not ashamed, my friend and benefactor, Makar Alekseyevich, to indulge in all this sorrowing and fretting? Can it really be that you have taken offence? Oh, I know that I am often incautious, but I did not think that you would take my words as a malicious joke. You may be assured that I shall never have the effrontery to make jokes about your years or your character. This has all come about because of my frivolity, and even more because I am dreadfully bored, and what will one not do from boredom? I assumed, you see, that you were joking in your letter. I became terribly sad when I saw that you were displeased with me. No, my kind friend and benefactor, you will be wrong if ever you suspect me of insensitivity or ingratitude. I know how to treasure in my heart all the things that you have done for me, protecting me from wicked people, from their persecution and hatred. I shall pray for you always, and if my prayers reach God and Heaven attends them, you shall be happy.

I feel very unwell today. I am feverish and shivering in turn. Fedora is very worried about me. It is silly of you to be too embarrassed to come and see us, Makar Alekseyevich. What business is it of others? We are friends, and that is that... Goodbye, Makar Alekseyevich. I have nothing to write about now, and indeed I cannot write: I feel terribly unwell. I beg you once again not to be angry with me and to be assured of the constant esteem and devotion with which I have the honour to remain,

Your most humble servant,

VARVARA DOBROSELOVA

April 12

Varvara Alekseyevna, Madam,

Oh, my little mother, whatever is the matter with you? Each time you frighten me in the same way. In each of my letters I tell you to look after yourself, to wrap yourself up, not to go out in the bad weather, to observe caution in all things – but, my little angel, you do not listen to me! Oh, my little dove, you are like some child! I mean, you are frail,

frail as a little wisp of straw, I know it. The slightest little breeze, and you go and catch a chill. So you must be on your guard, take care of yourself, avoid risks and not bring your friends grief and despondency.

You express the wish, little mother, to learn the details of my everyday life and all that surrounds me. With joy I hasten to carry out your wish, my darling. I shall begin from the beginning, dearest: that way it will be more orderly! In the first instance, the staircases at the front side of our house are positively handsome; the main staircase is particularly so – it is clean, light, wide, all cast-iron and mahogany. On the other hand, don't inquire about the back stairs: they are winding, damp and dirty, with steps broken and the walls so greasy that your hand sticks when you lean against them. On every landing there are chests, broken chairs and cupboards, old clothes hung up, windows with panes knocked out; tubs stand around filled with all kinds of evil stuff: dirt, sweepings, eggshells and fishes' bladders; a bad smell... in short – nasty.

I have already described the arrangement of the rooms; there is no denying that it is a convenient one – that is true, but for some reason they are rather stuffy; it's not that there's a bad smell as such – there's rather, if I may put it this way, a slightly rotten, sweet-sour smell. The first time you smell it it doesn't seem awfully prepossessing, but it's really nothing at all; you have only to be in our house for a minute or two and it passes, and you don't notice it passing because you yourself smell bad – your clothes, your hands, everything... well, and so you get used to it. The skins in our house are dying off like anything. The warrant-officer is presently buying our fifth – they simply can't live in our air, and that's the truth of it. Our kitchen is a large one, spacious and light. It's true that it does get a bit smoky in the mornings, when people are cooking their fish or beef and pouring and spilling stuff everywhere, but in the evenings it's heaven. In our kitchen there's always some old underwear hanging on a line; and since my room is close by, in fact almost adjoins the kitchen, the smell does bother me a bit; but never mind: one lives and makes the best of it.

In our house, Varenka, the noise begins very early in the morning: the noise of people getting out of bed, walking about, knocking on doors – all who have to are bestirring themselves, in order to go to work or to engage in their own business; everyone sets about having morning tea. Our samovars are for the most part owned by the landlady; there are not enough of them, so we all use them by turn; and woe betide anyone who takes his teapot out of turn! I did that the first time, and... but why write about it? I got to know everyone here at the same time. The warrant-officer was the first person whose acquaintance I made; he is an open fellow, and he told me everything about himself: his father, his mother, his sister, who is married to an assessor in Tula, * and about the town of Kronstadt. He promised to take me under his wing and invited me to have tea with him right then and there. I found him in the room where the people in our house usually play cards. There I was served with tea and those present insisted that I should gamble with them. Whether they were laughing at me or not, I don't know; all I know is that they themselves had been playing all night, and when I went in they were still at it. I saw chalk, and cards; there was so much smoke in the room that it stung one's eyes. I said I didn't want to take part, and they at once observed that I was talking philosophy. After that no one talked to me at all; of which I was truly glad. I shall not go and see them now; all they do is gamble, nothing but gamble! The government clerk who works in the literary department also holds gatherings in the evenings. Yes, and they are pleasant and modest, innocent and delicate; it is all on a refined footing.

Well, Varenka, I shall also just remark in passing that our landlady is a thoroughly unpleasant woman, a regular old witch. You have seen Teresa. Well, what would you say she is like? As thin as a plucked, sick chicken. There are only two domestic staff in the house: Teresa and Faldoni, * the landlady is manservant. I do not know, perhaps he has some other name as well, but he only answers to this one; everyone calls him by it. he is a red-haired man, some kind of Finn – crooked-figured, pug-nosed, a coarse and disgusting fellow: he is forever quarrelling with Teresa, they almost come to blows. In general, I find life here not entirely a good thing... If only everyone went to bed and slept at the same time –but that never happens. There are always people sitting up late gambling somewhere, and sometimes things happen which I should be too embarrassed to tell you about. However, I'm used to it now, though I wonder how family men can

manage to live in such a Sodom. There is a whole family of poor wretches of some sort who live in a room they rent from our landlady, only it is not near the other rooms, but on the other side of the building, in a corner by itself. Humble folk! No one ever hears anything about them. They live in the one room, dividing it with a partition. he is some out-of-work government clerk, who lost his job seven years ago for some misdemeanour. His name's Gorshkov; he's a little, grey-haired man; he goes about in such stained, worn-out clothes that it hurts just to look at him; they're in a much worse state than mine! He's a pathetic, sickly looking fellow (I sometimes meet him in the corridor); his knees shake, his hands shake, his head shakes, from what illness God only knows; he's shy, afraid of everyone, and goes about furtively; I know I'm timid occasionally, but he's even worse. His family is made up of his wife and three children. The oldest child, a boy, looks just like his father, the same sickly type. His wife must once have been not at all bad-looking, you can see it even now; she goes around in such pitiful rags, the poor wretch. I heard that they have got themselves into debt with the landlady; she is none too friendly towards them. I also heard that Gorshkov is in some trouble or other, and that that is why he lost his job... whether he's to be put on trial, whether he's being prosecuted, or whether he's being made the subject of an investigation, I really can't tell you. One thing is certain, and that is that they're poor – my, how they're poor! Their room is always quiet and peaceful, as though there were no one living there. You don't even hear their children. You never ever see the children out enjoying themselves, playing around, and that's a bad sign. I happened to pass their door one evening; it had grown somewhat unusually quiet in the house; I could hear sobbing, then whispering, then sobbing again, as if they were crying in there, so quietly and pitifully that my heart almost broke, and afterwards all night long the thought of those poor wretches would not leave me, so that I couldn't get to sleep properly.

Well, goodbye, my little treasure of a friend, Varenka! I have described it all for you to the best of my ability. All day I have thought of nothing but you. My heart has been pining for you, my dear. After all, my darling, I know that you have no warm coat. These St Petersburg springs with their wind and rain mixed with snow – they'll be the death of me, Varenka! Such temperate weather* that the Lord preserve us! Don't be too hard on my writing, darling; I have no style, Varenka, no style at all. If only I had just a little bit! I write what wanders into my mind, so as to provide you with some diversion. If only I had done some studying, everything would be different; but what kind of studying have I done? Not even enough to scrape by on.

Your constant and faithful friend,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

April 25

Makar Alekseyevich, Sir,

Today I met my cousin Sasha! What a terrible thing to happen! She too will be ruined, poor woman! I also heard from the certain quarter that Anna Fyodorovna is still making enquiries about me. I do not think she will ever stop trying to make my life a misery. She says she wants to *forgive me*, to forget all that has been, and that she will come to visit me. She says that you are no relation to me at all, that she is a closer relation, that you have no right to enter into our family affairs and that I ought to be ashamed and embarrassed to live on your charity and your salary... she says I have forgotten her hospitality, that she probably saved mother and me from death by starvation, that she fed us and looked after us and was out of pocket on our account for more than two-and-a-half years, that in addition to all that she agreed to overlook a debt we owed her. And she hadn't a good word to say for mother! Oh, if poor mother only knew what they have done to me! God sees it!... Anna Fyodorovna says I was too stupid to and on to my luck, that she took me down the right path, that she is not to blame for any of the other things that have happened and that it was I who was either unable or, possibly, unwilling to stand up for my own honour. But who was to blame for that, Great God in Heaven? She says that Mr Bykov was entirely in the right, and that a man doesn't simply go and marry the first woman who... but why should I write about that? It is cruel to hear such slanders, Makar Alekseyevich! I do not know what is happening to me

right now. I am trembling, weeping, sobbing; it has taken me two hours to write you this letter. I thought that at least she would admit her guilt in my regard; and look how she is behaving now! For God's sake, don't worry, my friend, my only well-wisher! Fedora exaggerates everything: I am not ill. I simply caught a slight cold yesterday when I went to Volkovo for mother's funeral. Why did you not come with me? I told you that I wanted you to, so badly. Oh, my poor, poor mother, if only you were able to rise from your coffin, if only you knew, if only you could see what they have done to me!

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V. D.

May 20

Darling Varenka!

I send you a few grapes, my darling; they are said to be good for those who are convalescing, and the doctor recommends them for the alleviation of thirst – especially for thirst, as it were. You expressed a wish for roses the other day, little mother; so now I send you some herewith. Do you have an appetite, my darling? – that is the most important thing. Anyway, thank God that all that is over and done with, and that our misfortunes are also drawing to a decisive close. Let us offer thanks to Heaven! But as for books, I have so far been unable to obtain them anywhere. There is said to be one particularly good book, written in a very fine style; it is supposed to be good, I have not read it myself, but everyone here sings its praises. I have ordered it, and have received the promise that it will be dispatched to me. Only will you read it? In my experience, you are hard to please in these matters; it is difficult to satisfy your taste, I know it well, my little dove; I expect what you want is poetry, lovers' complaints, amours – well, I shall obtain poetry for you, I shall obtain everything; they have a notebook with verses copied in it there.

As for myself, I am well. Please do not worry about me, little mother. What Fedora told you about me is all nonsense; you tell her that she's been spreading lies about me, the gossip!... I certainly have not sold my new uniform. I mean, judge for yourself, what on earth would induce me to go and do that? They tell me that I'm to receive forty rubles in bonus pay soon, so why should I need to sell my uniform? Don't you let yourself be upset, little mother; she is mistrustful, that Fedora, she has a suspicious mind. We shall be all right, my little dove! Only, my angel, you must get better, do you hear, you must get better, and not make an old man unhappy. Who told you that I have grown thin?

Slander, more slander! I am thoroughly healthy and have put on so much weight that I have a bad conscience about it – I am stuffed full to the gullet; all I want is for you to get better! Well, goodbye my little angel; I kiss each one of your fingers and remain,

Your eternal, constant friend,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

PS Oh, my darling, why do you write this again?... What game are you playing with me? How can I visit you so often, little mother, how? I ask you. Perhaps under cover of darkness; but it hardly gets dark at nights now, * at this time of the year. You know, my little mother, little angel, I hardly left your side during all the time you were ill, when you lay unconscious; even now I don't really know how I managed to do all that I did; and afterwards I stopped visiting you, because people had started to get nosy and ask questions. Even without all that, there had been some kind of gossip going around here. I put my faith in Teresa; she knows how to hold her tongue; but even so, little mother, imagine how it will be when they find out everything about us, what they will think and what they will say. So you must be strong, my darling, and wait until you are better again; and then we shall arrange a rendezvous somewhere out of doors.

1 June

Dearest Makar Alekseyevich,

I so much want to do something nice for you in return for all the effort and trouble you have put yourself to because of me, and in recognition of your love for me, that I have finally determined to get the better of my reluctance to rummage around in my locker and fish out my exercise-book, which I am sending you now. I began it at a happy time in my life. You often used to ask with curiosity about the way I used to live, about my mother, about Pokrovsky, about the time I spent in the home of Anna Fyodorovna and about my recent troubles, and you were so impatient in your wish to read this exercise-book, in which I had the idea, heaven knows why, of jotting down random moments of my life, that I have no doubt my parcel will bring you great enjoyment. As for myself, however – reading it over made me feel sad. I seem to have aged twice over since the time I wrote the last line of these notes. They were all written at different times. Goodbye, Makar Alekseyevich! I feel terribly low just now, and I am frequently tormented by insomnia. What a tiresome convalescence!

V. D.

I

I was only fourteen years old when Father died. My childhood was the happiest time of my life. It began not here, but far away, in the provinces, in the wilds. Father was the manager of the enormous estate belonging to Prince P., in the province of T. We lived in one of the Prince's villages, and our life was quiet, unobserved, and happy... I was ever such a playful little child; all I ever did was run around the fields, the woods and the orchard, and no one ever paid me the slightest attention. Father was constantly preoccupied with business matters, and my mother took care of the household; no one tried to give me any education, for which I was grateful. I can remember that from the earliest morning onwards I would be running off to the pond, or the wood, or the haymaking, or the reapers – and never mind that the sun was baking down, that I had wandered heaven only knows where away from the village, was covered in scratches from the bushes, and had torn my clothes – I would be given a scolding at home later on, but I did not care. And I think that I should have been truly happy if it had been necessary for me to spend my entire life never leaving the village and staying in the same place. As it turned out, I had to leave my native corner while still a child. I was only twelve when we moved to St Petersburg. Oh, with what sadness I recall our melancholy preparations. How I wept as I said goodbye to all that was so dear to me. Father began to shout at me, and Mother cried; she said that there was nothing for it, that Father's business demanded it. Old Prince P. had died. The inheritors had dismissed Father from his position. Father had some money which was being circulated among private individuals in St Petersburg. In the hope of easing his financial difficulties, he decided it would be best for him to be present here in the capital himself. I found all this out from Mother later on. We settled here on the St Petersburg Side* and lived in the same place right up until Father's death. How difficult I found it to accustom myself to my new life! We went to St Petersburg in the autumn. The day we left the village was such a bright, warm, clear one; the work on the farms was drawing to a close; enormous stacks of grain were already piling up on the threshing floors, and shrill flocks of birds were wheeling about; everything was so serene and cheerful. Yet here, as we arrived in the city, we were greeted by rain, a damp autumn drizzle, foul weather, sleet and a host of new, unfamiliar faces – hostile, malcontent, and angry! Somehow we settled in. I remember that we were all in such a state of excitement, constantly fussing about as we set up our new home. Father was, as usual, not at home, and Mother had not a single free moment – I was completely ignored. I felt sad when I got up in the morning after my first night in our new quarters. Our windows looked out on to some kind of yellow fencing. The street was in a perpetual state of mire. Passers-by were few, and they were always well wrapped up, everyone felt the cold so. In our home a terrible sense of depression and tedium would reign for whole days on end. We had practically no relatives or close acquaintances. Father was on bad terms with Anna Fyodorovna. (He owed her a certain amount of money.) People did come to see us quite frequently on business, but they usually spent the time arguing, making a fuss and shouting. After each visit Father would

become so ill-pleased and angry; I can remember that he used to pace the floor hour after hour, frowning, and never exchanging a word with anyone. At such times Mother did not dare to speak to him, and she kept silent. I would sit down somewhere in a corner with a book, as quiet as a mouse, not daring to make the slightest movement. Three months after we arrived in St Petersburg, I was sent to a girls' boarding-school. How sad I felt initially at being among strangers! Everything was so cold, so unfriendly – the governesses were such shouters, the girls were such scoffers, and I was such a savage. It was so strict and severe! The fixed times for everything, the communal eating, the obnoxious teachers – at first I found all that utterly tormenting. I could not sleep there, either. I would cry all night, all the long, cold, dreary night. In the evenings the girls usually repeated their lessons aloud, or learned them by heart; I would sit with my French conversations or vocabulary, not daring to stir a limb, and constantly thinking about our bit of home, about Father and Mother, about our old nurse, about nurse's stories... Oh, how depressed I would feel! I would find myself remembering even the most trivial objects in the house with affection. I would think and think: how good it would be to be at home now! I would sit in our little room, by the samovar, together with my own folk; it would be so warm, so good, so familiar. How tightly, how warmly I would embrace Mother, I would think. I would think and think, and quietly start to cry from heartbreak, choking back the tears, and forgetting all my vocabulary. It was always impossible for me to learn my lesson for the following day; all night I would dream of the male teacher, the madame, the girls; all night I would repeat my lessons in my sleep, but next day my head would be empty. I would be made to kneel, and given only one dish for my main meal. I was such a dull, miserable creature. At first the other girls kept laughing at me, teasing me, putting me off when I was saying my lessons, pinching me when we walked in lines to take our main meal, or tea, made complaints about me to the governess for no reason at all. On the other hand, what a paradise it was when nurse would come for me on Saturday evenings. I would hug the old woman in an ecstasy of joy. She would help me to put on my coat and shoes, and see that I was well wrapped up, and then would be unable to keep up with me as we walked, and I would chatter and chatter to her, telling her everything. I would arrive home cheerful and joyful, and would hug all the members of our household fiercely, as though I had been away for ten years. Gossip, conversations and stories would begin; I would say hello to everyone, laugh, giggle, skip and run about. I would have serious talks with Father about my studies, about our teachers, about the French language, about Lomond's grammar* – and we would all be so pleased, so happy. Even now I feel happy just remembering those moments. I did all that I could to apply myself to my studies and thus please Father. I could see that he was sacrificing the last of his money for my sake, and was struggling to get by, God knew how. With every day that passed he grew more gloomy, more ill-humoured, angrier; his character had been quite ruined; his business affairs were not going well, and there was a multitude of debts. Mother would be afraid to cry, afraid to say a word, in case she angered Father; she grew ill; became thinner and thinner and developed a nasty cough. I would arrive home from my boarding-school to such sad faces; Mother would be crying quietly to herself, and Father would be angry. There would be admonitions and rebukes. Father would say that I had brought him no joy, no consolation; that they were depriving themselves of the last that they owned because of me, yet still I could not speak French; in other words, all his failures, all his misfortunes, all, all were unloaded on to Mother and me. And how could he torment poor Mother? My heart used to break just at the sight of her: her cheeks had grown sunken, her eyes had retreated into their sockets, her face bore a consumptive hue. I was the one who caught it more often than not. It would always start with trivia, but would subsequently develop into heaven only knows what; often I did not even understand what it was all about. What was there that was not the matter? That I could not speak French, that I was a great numbskull, and that the headmistress of our boarding-school was a stupid, negligent woman, who paid no attention to our morals; that Father still could not find a job, and that Lomond's grammar was no good, Zapolsky's* was far better; that they had thrown away a lot of money on me for nothing; that it was plain to see I was unfeeling, with a heart of stone – in other words, I, poor girl, struggled with all my might to do my lessons and vocabularies, but was guilty for everything, responsible for everything! And this was not at all because Father did not love me: he loved both Mother and me deeply. It was just what had happened to his character.

Poor Father's worries, troubles and failures tortured him in the extreme: he became mistrustful and splenetic; he was frequently close to despair, began to neglect his health, caught a cold and suddenly fell ill. His sufferings did not last long; he died so abruptly and so without warning that for several days we were all stunned by the blow. Mother was in a kind of rigid trance; I even feared for her sanity. No sooner had Father died than his creditors appeared before us as if they had sprung from the ground; they hurled themselves upon us in a crowd. We had to give them everything we possessed. Even our little house on the St Petersburg Side, the one Father had bought six months after we moved to St Petersburg, was sold. I don't know how the rest of the business was settled, but we ourselves were left without a roof over our heads, without anywhere to go, and without our daily bread. Mother was suffering from a wasting disease, we were unable to provide for ourselves, and before us lay ruin. At that time I was only just fourteen years old. It was at this juncture that Anna Fyodorovna paid us a visit. She kept saying that she was some kind of landowner, and also that she was some kind of relative of ours. Mother, too, said that Anna Fyodorovna was a relative of ours, only a very distant one. Anna Fyodorovna had never come to see us while Father was alive. She appeared with tears in her eyes, said that she had the greatest sympathy for us; she commiserated with us in our loss and in our wretched position, and added that Father himself had been to blame: that he had not lived according to his means, had overreached himself and had placed too much faith in his own powers. She confessed a desire to get to know us better, offered to forget our mutual disagreements; and when Mother declared that she had never had any bad feelings for her, she shed a few tears, took Mother into a church and ordered a requiem mass for the 'darling man' (that was how she referred to Father). Having done that, she solemnly made her peace with Mother.

After many lengthy preambles and forewarnings, Anna Fyodorovna, having depicted to us in vivid colours our wretched position, our orphaned state, our hopelessness and helplessness, invited us, as she put it, to take shelter with her. Mother thanked her, but was for a long time unable to make up her mind; but as there was nothing to be done, and no other way of making any satisfactory arrangements, she finally announced to Anna Fyodorovna that we would accept her proposal with gratitude. I can still now remember the morning on which we moved from the St Petersburg Side to Vassilevsky Island. It was a clear, dry, frosty autumn morning. Mother was in tears; I felt terribly sad; my breast felt as though it were bursting, and my heart ached with a dreadful, inexplicable pain... It was a distressing time...

II

Initially, until we – Mother and I, that is – had grown accustomed to our new abode, we both found life in Anna Fyodorovna's house a strange and in some ways terrifying experience. Anna Fyodorovna lived in a house of her own on the Sixth Line. There were only five habitable rooms in the house. Three of them were occupied by Anna Fyodorovna and my female cousin Sasha, whom she was bringing up – Sasha was just a child, an orphan who had no father or mother. We lived in one of the remaining rooms, and the other, next to ours, housed a poor student named Pokrovsky, Anna Fyodorovna's lodger. Anna Fyodorovna lived very well, better than one might have supposed; but the sources of her capital were mysterious, as were the tasks that kept her busy. She was always bustling about, always preoccupied; went out by carriage or on foot several times a day; but what she did, what preoccupied her and why, I was never able to fathom. The circle of her acquaintances was large and varied. She had a constant stream of visitors, and Lord only knows what kind of people they were, always calling on some sort of business and only for a moment or two. Mother would always take me off to our room as soon as the doorbell rang. Anna Fyodorovna was always terribly angry with Mother because of this, and was forever saying that we were too proud, proud beyond our means, and that it would be a matter if we had something to be proud about, and kept going on like that for whole hours on end. At that time I did not understand these accusations of pride; it is only now that I think I know, or can at least surmise, why Mother was unable to make up her mind to go and live in Anna Fyodorovna's house. Anna Fyodorovna was a malicious woman; she tormented us constantly. It is to this day a mystery to me why she invited us to go and live with her. At the outset she was reasonably pleasant to us, but then, when she realized that we were helpless and had nowhere to go, she displayed her true colours. Later on she became quite affectionate towards me, affectionate in a vulgar sort of way that verged on

flattery, but initially I had to put up with everything that Mother had to put up with. She was on at us every minute of the day; all she ever did was remind us that she was our benefactress. She would introduce us to strangers as her poor relatives, a helpless widow and orphan whom she had given shelter in her home out of mercy, for the sake of Christian charity. At table she would watch every mouthful we took, but if we did not eat, there would be more trouble: she would say that we were turning up our noses at what she offered us, that it was not good enough for us, that we were ungrateful. She constantly criticized Father, saying that he had wanted to be better than other people, and a fat lot of good that had done him; he had left his wife and daughter to sink or swim, and if they had not had a female relative with a charitable, compassionate, Christian soul, they might, God only knew, have perished of hunger on the street. The things she said! Listening to her, one felt less bitterness than revulsion. Mother was constantly in tears; her health was getting worse from day to day, she was visibly wasting away, yet all the while she and I were working from morning to night, taking in orders for sewing, which thoroughly displeased Anna Fyodorovna; she kept repeating that her home was not a fashion shop. But we had to clothe ourselves, we had to put money by for unforeseeable expenses, we simply had to have money of our own. We were saving just in case it proved possible to move somewhere else in time. But doing the work, Mother lost what little good health she had left: she was growing weaker with each day that passed. Her illness, like a canker, was visibly undermining her life and was bringing her close to the grave. I saw it all, felt it all, suffered it all: it was all happening before my eyes! Day followed day, and every one of them was the same as the others. We lived a quiet life, not like a life in town at all. Anna Fyodorovna gradually calmed down as she began fully to realize the extent of her power. But no one ever dared to contradict her. Our room was separated from her half of the house by a corridor, and next to us, as I have already mentioned, lived Pokrovsky. He taught Sasha French and German, history, geography – ‘all the sciences’, as Anna Fyodorovna used to say, providing him in return for this with board and lodging; Sasha was a nimble-minded girl, though she was playful and naughty; at that time she was thirteen. Anna Fyodorovna made it known to Mother that she would consider it not a bad idea for me to start lessons with Pokrovsky too, since they were not teaching me properly at my boarding-school. Mother readily agreed, and for a whole year I took lessons from Pokrovsky together with Sasha. Pokrovsky was poor – a very poor young man; his health did not permit him to follow any continuous course of study, and it was merely out of habit that we referred to him as ‘the student’. He lived modestly, peacefully, and quietly, and no sound of him could be heard from our room. His appearance was rather odd; so awkwardly did he walk, so awkwardly did he bow, and so strangely did he speak that at first I could not look at him without laughing. Sasha was forever playing pranks on him, especially when he was giving us our lessons. Also, he had an irritable disposition – he constantly got angry, losing his temper over the merest trifles, shouted at us, complained about us and frequently went off to his room in a rage, without having completed the lesson. Left to himself, however, he would sit poring over his books for days on end. He had a lot of books, and they were all expensive, rare ones. He gave lessons in a few other places as well, and received some kind of payment for them; as soon as he had any money, he would at once go out and buy books. In time I got to know him better, more intimately. He was the kindest and most worthy of men, better than any I have ever met. Mother respected him deeply. He eventually became my best friend – after Mother, that is, of course. At first, grown-up girl or not, I caused just as much mischief as Sasha, and for hours on end we would rack our brains trying to think of ways to tease Pokrovsky and wear out his patience. He was really comical when he lost his temper, and for us this was a great source of fun. (I am truly ashamed to remember that now.) On one occasion we tormented him about something almost to the point of tears, and I distinctly heard him whisper: ‘Wicked children!’ I suddenly grew embarrassed; I felt ashamed, and sickened, and sorry for him. I remember that I blushed to the roots of my hair, and with tears in my eyes begged him to calm himself and not be offended by our stupid pranks; but he closed the book, leaving our lesson unfinished, and went off to his room. I spent all that day in an agony of remorse. The thought that we children had reduced him to tears by our cruel behaviour was unbearable to me. I redoubled that we had been waiting for him to burst into tears; that was what we had wanted. We had succeeded in exasperating him beyond the limits of his endurance; we had compelled him, poor, unfortunate man, to remember his cruel destiny. I lay awake all night with vexation, sadness and remorse. They say that remorse brings relief to the soul – on the contrary. I do not know

how it was, but vanity also managed to get mixed up in my unhappiness. I did not want him to view me as a child. By that time I was already fifteen. From that day onward I began to torture my imagination, creating thousands of plans to make Pokrovsky alter his opinion of me. But now I was afflicted by a chronic timidity and shyness: in my present situation I could not for the life of me make my mind up about anything, and I confined myself to dreams alone (and God knows, what dreams they were!). But I did stop playing pranks with Sasha. Pokrovsky stopped losing his temper with us; but that was not sufficient for my vanity. I shall now say a few words about the strangest, most curious and most pathetic human being of all those it has been my fortune to meet. I speak of him now, at precisely this moment in my notes, because until that time I had scarcely paid him any attention – but now everything that concerned Pokrovsky suddenly acquired a special interest for me. There sometimes used to appear in our household a little old man, grey-haired, shabbily dressed, mud-bespattered, awkward and clumsy – in short, impossibly strange. From a first glance at him one might have thought he was ashamed of something; he looked as though he had something on his conscience. This made him constantly huddle himself up and make faces to himself in a peculiar sort of way; he had such odd mannerisms and made such strange grimaces that one might, without being very much mistaken, have supposed him to be not in his right mind. He would come to our house and stand in the entrance hall outside the glass doors, not daring to come inside. If he saw one of us going past – Sasha or myself, or one of the servants whom he knew to be kindly disposed towards him – he would immediately start waving, beckoning to himself, and making various signs, and it was only when one nodded to him and called to him – the prearranged signal that there were no visitors in the house and that he might enter whenever he wished to – only then would the old man quietly open the door, smile with delight, rub his hands with satisfaction and proceed straight on tiptoe to Pokrovsky's room. This was Pokrovsky's father. I later discovered most of the details of this poor old man's story. He had once had a government position somewhere, had no abilities whatsoever and had occupied the lowliest and most insignificant post in the service. On the death of his first wife (the mother of our 'student' Pokrovsky), he had taken it into his head to marry a second time, and married a tradesman's daughter. His new wife turned the household upside down; she would leave no one alone, took everyone in hand. At that time our 'student' Pokrovsky was only a child of about ten years old. His stepmother hated him. But fate smiled on little Pokrovsky. The landowner Bykov, who knew the government clerk Pokrovsky and had once been his benefactor, took the child into his care and found him a place in some school or other. He took an interest in the boy because he had known his dead mother, who as a girl had received the good favours of Anna Fyodorovna and had been married by her to the government clerk Pokrovsky. Moved by generosity, Mr Bykov, a friend and intimate acquaintance of Anna Fyodorovna's, had given the sum of five thousand rubles as a dowry for the bride. Where that money had gone, no one knew. That was the story as Anna Fyodorovna told it to me; the 'student' Pokrovsky never liked talking about his family circumstances. They say that his mother was very good-looking, and I find it strange that she should have made such a poor marriage to such an insignificant man... She died when she was still quite young, about four years after the marriage. From school young Pokrovsky went to some gymnasium or other, and then on to university. But Mr Bykov, who made very frequent visits to St Petersburg, did not stop his patronage with that. Because of his disturbed state of health, Pokrovsky was unable to continue his studies at the university. Mr Bykov introduced him to Anna Fyodorovna with his own personal recommendation, and thus the young Pokrovsky was taken into the household as a dependant, on condition that he teach Sasha everything that might be required. Meanwhile, old Pokrovsky, demented by his wife's cruelty, abandoned himself to the very worst of vices, and was almost constantly drunk. His wife used to beat him, banished him to the kitchen and reduced him to a state in which he grew accustomed to her beatings and did not complain of her maltreatment of him. He was not yet really all that old, but his self-destructive inclinations had practically turned him into a dotard. The only sign of decent human feeling he ever showed was his boundless love for his son. People used to say that the young Pokrovsky was the spitting image of his dead mother. Might it not have been the memory of his kindly first wife that had inspired the ruined old man's heart with such an infinite love for him? The old man could speak of nothing but his son, and called to see him without fail two times a week. He did not dare to call more often, because the young Pokrovsky could not stand his father's visits. Of all the young man's faults, the principal and most grievous was unquestionably his

lack of respect for his father. It should, of course, be added that the old man could on occasion be the most intolerable creature in the world. For one thing, he was horribly inquisitive, and for another, by his comments and questions, which were invariably of a most trivial and incoherent kind, he constantly interfered with his son's studies and would sometimes even turn up drunk. Little by little, the son managed to wean his father away from his vices, his inquisitiveness and his compulsive talking, and finally reached a stage where the old man obeyed him, as though he were an oracle, in all things, and did not dare to open his mouth without his son's permission. The poor old man could not sufficiently admire and dote upon his Petenka (as he called his son). Whenever he called to visit him, he nearly always had a worried, timid look, probably because he did not know how his son would receive him. He would usually spend a long time hesitating whether to come in or not, and if I chanced to be there, he would question me for about twenty minutes, asking me about 'Petenka' and how his health was, what kind of mood he was in, whether he was engaged in any important study, what he was actually doing – whether he was writing or absorbed in reflection. When I had sufficiently raised his spirits and put his mind at rest, the old man would finally make up his mind to come in and very quietly, very gingerly, he would open the door, and begin by putting his head round it; if he saw that his son was not in a bad temper and nodded to him, he would slowly enter the room, take off his overcoat and his hat – which was always squashed, full of holes, and ragged-brimmed – and hang both on a hook, performing the action slowly and inaudibly; then he would sit down carefully on a chair somewhere, never taking his eyes off his son, following his every movement in an attempt to guess the frame of mind his Petenka was in. If his son was even slightly in a bad mood and the old man was able to observe this, he would at once rise from his seat and explain: 'I only dropped in for a moment, Petenka. I've been out for a long walk, I was passing, and looked in to take a rest.' And then silently and obediently he would take his hat and overcoat, slowly open the door once again and go out, smiling to his son, smiling forcedly in order to keep to himself the misery that seethed within him, and not show it to his son.

When, on the other hand, his son received his father well, the old man would be beside himself with joy. His pleasure would make itself visible in his face, his gestures, and his movements. If his son said anything to him, the old man would invariably get up slightly from his chair and reply in a quiet, servile tone bordering on reverence, always trying to use the most refined, that is, the most ridiculous expressions. But he had no gift for words: he would always grow confused and lose his nerve, since he did not know where to put his hands or to put himself, and would whisper his side of the conversation to himself for a long time afterwards, as though he were trying to correct himself. If, on the other hand, he had succeeded in answering well, the old man would preen himself, straighten his waistcoat, tie and jacket and assume an air that suggested he knew his own worth. It occasionally happened that he recovered his spirits to such an extent and grew so emboldened that he slowly rose from his chair, went over to the bookshelf, took down a book at random, and read aloud from it right there and then, whatever he had chanced to select. All this he did with an air of pretended indifference and detachment, as though he could always behave in such a lordly fashion with his son's books, as though he found nothing remarkable about his having been treated kindly by him. I once, however, chanced to witness how frightened the poor man became when Pokrovsky asked him not to touch the books. He grew confused, began to fuss around, replaced the book upside down, then tried to put it back the right way up, turned it round and replaced it with its spine facing inward, smiled, blushed and was at a loss how to cover up his crime. By his counselling, Pokrovsky managed to wean the old man away from his self-destructive habits, and as soon as he saw him sober, let us say, on three successive occasions, then the next time the old man visited him he would give on parting a twenty-five copeck piece, a fifty-copeck piece, or more. He would sometimes buy him boots, a tie or a waistcoat. The old man would be as proud as a turkey-cock in his new clothes. Sometimes he would come to our room. He would bring cockerel-shaped honey-cakes, and apples, for Sasha and myself, and would spend all the time telling us about Petenka. He would ask us to study attentively and be obedient, saying that Petenka was a good son, an exemplary son and, what was more, a learned son. As he did so, he would wink at us ridiculously with his left eye and make such comical faces that we were unable to restrain our hilarity and laughed at him for all we were worth. Mother was very fond of him. But the old man hated Anna

Fyodorovna, even though in her presence he was as quiet as a mouse.

Soon I stopped taking lessons with Pokrovsky. He still viewed me as a child, a naughty little girl, on a par with Sasha. This hurt me considerably, as I was doing my utmost to make up for my previous behaviour. But no one paid any attention to that. That irritated me more and more. I practically never spoke to Pokrovsky outside of lessons, nor could I speak. I blushed, was confused, and afterwards wept in a corner from disappointment.

I do not know how all this would have ended, had not a certain strange circumstance contrived to bring us close to each other. One evening, when Mother was talking to Anna Fyodorovna, I quietly entered Pokrovsky's room. I knew that he was not at home, and I do not really know why I took it into my head to go in. Until that time I had never paid him even the briefest visit, even though we had been living next door to each other for more than a year. On this occasion my heart beat so violently that I thought it might burst out of me. I looked around me with intense curiosity. Pokrovsky's room was very shabbily furnished; it was not very tidy. Five long bookshelves containing books had been nailed to the walls. The table and the chairs were heaped with papers. Books and papers! I suddenly had a strange thought, and at the same time a nasty sense of disappointment took hold of me. It seemed that my friendship and my loving heart were of little account to him. He was educated, while I was stupid and knew nothing, had read nothing, not a single book... At this point I cast an envious glance at the long shelves sagging with books. I was seized with disappointment, depression, a kind of rage. I conceived a desire, which I acted on at once, to read his books, every single one of them, as quickly as possible. I am not sure, but perhaps I thought that if I learned everything he knew, I should be more worthy of his friendship. I rushed to the first shelf; without thinking, without hesitating, I seized the first dusty old tome that fell into my hands and, blushing, trembling with fear and agitation, carried the stolen book off to my room, having decided to read it at night, by the glow from the night-light, when mother was asleep.

Great, however, was my disappointment when, on regaining our room, I hurriedly opened the book and discovered that it was some ancient, semi-decomposed, utterly worm-eaten treatise in Latin. I lost no time in taking it back. Just as I was about to replace the book on its shelf, I heard a noise in the corridor, and someone's footsteps, quite close. I tried to be as quick as I could, but the wretched book had been so firmly wedged in its row that when I took it out all the others displaced themselves and closed ranks in such a way that there was now no room for their former companion. I had not the strength to squeeze the book back in. But I did push the other books back as hard as I was able. The rusty nail by which the shelf was fixed to the wall and which seemed to have been awaiting precisely that moment in order to snap, snapped. The shelf collapsed at one end, and the books went noisily scattering all over the floor. The door opened, and Pokrovsky entered the room.

I should observe that he could not abide anyone interfering with his possessions. Woe betide anyone who laid a finger on his books! Consider, then, my sense of horror when those books – large and small, of every imaginable format, size and thickness – came hurtling down from the shelf and went careering and fluttering under the table, under the chairs, all over the room. I would have made my escape, but it was too late. 'I'm finished,' I thought, 'finished! It's all up with me, I'm for it! I'm being silly and naughty like a child of ten years old: I'm just a stupid little girl! A big idiot!' Pokrovsky flew into the most dreadful rage. 'Well, that's all that was wanting!' he cried. 'Well, aren't you ashamed to play silly pranks like this?... Won't you ever learn any sense?' And he rushed to pick up the books. I began to stoop down in order to help him. 'Don't, don't!' he cried. 'You would do better not to go where you have not been invited.' Then, however, slightly mollified by my submissive behaviour, he continued more quietly, in his customary teacher's voice, taking advantage of his customary teacher's authority: 'Well, when are you going to learn some self-control and start to behave sensibly, for a change? I mean, just look at you, you're not a child, you're not a little girl any longer – you're fifteen years old!' And at this point, doubtless in an endeavour to make sure that I really was no longer a little girl, he cast a glance at me and blushed to the roots of his hair. At first, I did not understand; I stood in front of him, staring at him in amazement. He got up, approached me with an air of embarrassment, grew horribly confused, and started to

speaking: he was evidently apologizing for something, perhaps for only now having noticed that I was such a big girl. At last I understood. I can't remember what happened to me then; I grew confused, flustered, blushed even deeper than Pokrovsky, covered my face with my hands and ran out of the room.

I did not know what there was left for me to do, or where to hide my head in shame. The mere fact that he had caught me in his room! For three entire days I was unable to bring myself even to look at him. I kept blushing to the point of tears. The strangest, most ridiculous thoughts kept whirling about in my head. One of them, the wildest, was a desire to go to him, have it out with him, confess everything to him, frankly tell him all and convince him that I had behaved not as a stupid little girl, but with good intentions. I had almost made up my mind to do this, but, thank God, found that I did not possess the necessary courage. I can imagine what a fool of myself I should have made! Even now I have pangs of conscience at the memory of the whole episode.

A few days later Mother suddenly fell dangerously ill. She lay in bed for two days, and on the third night she developed a fever and delirium. I had already lost one night of sleep looking after her, sitting by her bedside, bringing her water to drink and giving her her medicine at the prescribed times. By the second night I was completely exhausted. At times sleep overcame me, my eyes went dark, my head grew dizzy, and I was constantly on the point of collapsing with weariness; but Mother's feeble groaning kept rousing me, and I would start and wake up for a moment before slumber once again got the better of me. I was in torment. I do not know how it was – I cannot remember – but at the agonizing moment of sleep's struggle with wakefulness a terrible vision, a monstrous dream visited my confused head. I woke up in horror. The room was in darkness, the night-light was going out; suddenly the whole room was bathed in stripes of light, which at one moment flashed across the wall and at the next disappeared entirely. For some reason I grew dreadfully afraid, I was attacked by a sense of horror; my fantasy had been aroused by the terrible dream I had had; anguish constricted my heart... I leapt up from my chair and let out an involuntary shriek, brought on by my sense of claustrophobic, agonized terror. At that moment the door opened, and Pokrovsky came into our room.

The only thing I remember is that when I regained consciousness I was in his arms. He sat me down in a chair, gave me a glass of water, and showered me with questions. I do not remember what I replied. 'You are ill, too, you are very ill,' he said taking my hand. 'You have a fever, you are damaging yourself, you must be kinder to your health; make your mind easy. Lie down, go to sleep. I shall wake you in two hours' time, try to get a little rest... Lie down, I say, lie down!' he continued, not letting me say a single word in objection. Tiredness had robbed me of the last of my strength; my eyes were closing from weakness. I lay down on the sofa, determined to sleep for only half an hour, and slept until morning. Pokrovsky did not wake me up until it was time for me to give Mother her medicine.

At about eleven o'clock the following evening when, having managed to rest a little in the afternoon, I was once again preparing to sit on the sofa by Mother's bedside, this time firmly resolving not to fall asleep, Pokrovsky knocked at the door of our room. 'It'll be boring for you sitting up on your own,' he said. 'Here's a book for you; take it; you won't get so bored then.' I took it; I don't remember what book it was; I hardly glanced at it then, even though I did not sleep all night. A strange inner agitation would not allow me to sleep; I was unable to remain in the same place; several times I got up from the *chaise-longue* and began to walk about the room. A kind of inner satisfaction spread itself throughout my entire being. I was so delighted by Pokrovsky's attentions. I took pride in his anxiety and concern about me. All night I thought and dreamed. Pokrovsky did not look in again; I knew he would not come, and I made guesses about the following evening.

Next evening, when everyone in the house had gone to bed, Pokrovsky opened his door and began to talk to me, standing on the threshold of his room. I do not remember now a single word of what we said to each other; all I remember is that I was shy and confused, that I was annoyed with myself and awaited the end of our conversation with impatience, even though I had desired it with all my heart, had spent the whole day dreaming about it and preparing my questions and replies... The beginnings of our friendship dated from that evening. Throughout the entire duration of

Mother's illness we spent several hours of every night in each other's company. Little by little I overcame my shyness, although after each of our conversations I would always find something to be annoyed with myself about. However that may have been, I none the less saw with secret delight and proud satisfaction that he was forgetting his wretched books because of me. Quite casually, almost in jest, our conversation once touched on the subject of their fall from the shelf. It was a strange moment – I was almost *too* open and candid; the heat of the moment and a strange enthusiasm carried me away, and I confessed everything to him... that I wanted to study, to know a few things, that I found it annoying to be regarded as a little girl, a child... I repeat that I was in a very strange mood; my heart was soft, there were tears in my eyes – I hid nothing and told him everything, everything – about my feelings of friendship for him, about my desire to live with him united in love, to console him, to calm him. He gave me a strange look which contained both embarrassment and amazement, and did not say a word. I suddenly felt terribly hurt and sad. It seemed to me that he did not understand me, that he might even be laughing at me. I suddenly started to cry like a child, sobbing, unable to control myself; it was as though I had succumbed to a kind of fit. He seized my hands, kissed them, held them to his breast, tried to reassure me, to console me; he was deeply moved. I do not remember what he said to me, only that I both wept and laughed, and once more wept, blushed, and was unable to utter a word for joy. Yet for all my emotional turmoil, I observed that Pokrovsky was still tense and embarrassed. He seemed to be unable to stop wondering at my animation, my enthusiasm, my so suddenly manifested, warm, ardent feelings of affection for him. Perhaps initially he had been merely curious; subsequently his lack of resolve disappeared, and he accepted, with the same simple directness as I, my attachment to him, my friendly words and my attention, and responded to it all with the same degree of attention, as kindly and amicably as if he were my sincere friend, my own brother. My heart felt so warm, so good!... I made no attempt to conceal my feelings from him, I kept nothing back; he saw it all, and with every day that passed became more attached to me.

And truly, I do not remember what we talked about during those sweet but tormenting hours when we would rendezvous by night, by the trembling flame of the icon-lamp, practically by the very bedside of my poor, sick mother... We talked about everything that came into our heads, that burst from our hearts, that begged to be given expression –and we were almost happy... Oh, that was a sad and joyful time – both at once; and it is with both sadness and joy that I now recall it. Memories, whether bitter or joyful, are always a source of torment; that, at least, is how I find it; but even this torment is sweet. And when the heart grows heavy, sick, anguished and sad, then memories refresh it and revive it, as on a dewy evening after a hot day the drops of moisture refresh and revive the poor, withered flower which has been scorched by the afternoon sun.

Mother's health began to improve, but still I continued to sit by her bedside at night. Pokrovsky would often lend me books; I read them, at first merely in order not to fall asleep, then with greater attention, then with avidity; suddenly there was revealed to me much that was new and that had previously been unknown or unfamiliar to me. New thoughts and new impressions came flooding into my heart in an instant, overwhelming rush. And the greater the agitation, the turmoil and effort these new sensations cost me, the more attractive I began to find them, the more sweetly they made my soul tremble. At once, in a flash they came thronging into my heart, denying it all rest. A strange chaos began to disturb my entire being. But this spiritual onslaught was unable to put me completely off balance. I was in too much of a dreamlike condition, and that was my saving.

When Mother's illness was over, our evening rendezvous and long conversations came to an end; we sometimes succeeded in exchanging words, often trivial and of little significance, but I took pleasure in giving everything its own special meaning, its own particular, implied value. My life was full, and I was happy – calmly, quietly happy. In this fashion several weeks went by...

One day old man Pokrovsky came to see us. He prattled on to us for a long time, and was unusually animated, cheerful and loquacious; he laughed, made jokes in his own peculiar way, and finally solved for us the mystery of his

enraptured state by revealing to us that in exactly a week's time it would be Petenka's birthday, on which occasion he would most certainly pay him a visit; he would put on a new waistcoat, and his wife had promised to buy him a new pair of boots. In short, the old man was thoroughly happy and went prattling on about everything that came into his head.

His birthday! That birthday gave me no peace either by day or by night. I determined to show Pokrovsky that I cared for him by giving him a present. But what? I finally had the idea of giving him some books. I knew that he wanted the complete collection of Pushkin's works in the most recent edition,^{*} and I resolved to buy it. I had about thirty rubles of my own, earned from needlework. I had been saving this money in order to buy a dress. I immediately sent our old cook Matryona to find out what a complete Pushkin cost. Alas! The price of all eleven volumes, including the cost of the bindings, was at least sixty rubles. Where would I get the money? I racked my brains, but could not think what to do. I did not want to ask Mother. She would, of course, have helped me; but then everyone in the house would have found out about our present; what was more, the present would have turned into a token of gratitude, a kind of repayment for the year of effort Pokrovsky had devoted to me. I wanted to give him the present alone, in secret from everyone else. And for his efforts with me I wanted to be for ever in his debt, without any repayment whatsoever apart from my friendly feelings for him. At last I conceived a way out of the problem.

I knew that at the second-hand bookstalls of the Gostiny Dvor it was sometimes possible, with a little bargaining, to buy books at half price, scarcely used and almost completely new. I decided to go down to the Gostiny Dvor. So it was; on the following day it turned out that both Anna Fyodorovna and ourselves needed certain purchases. Mother was slightly unwell, and Anna Fyodorovna very conveniently felt too lazy, so I was the one who had to do all the errands, and I set off together with Matryona.

As luck would have it, I found a complete edition of Pushkin very quickly – it was one in a very nice binding. I began to bargain. At first the stallowner demanded more than was charged in the bookshops; but after a while, though not without difficulty, and walking away several times, I succeeded in persuading him to reduce the price to only ten silver rubles. The bargaining was such fun!... Poor Matryona could not understand what had got into me, and why I wanted to buy so many books. But horror! My entire capital amounted to only thirty paper rubles, and the stallowner would not agree to part with the books more cheaply. Finally I began to implore him, beseech him, and in the end got my way. He yielded, but only by two and a half rubles, and he swore that he was only doing this as a special favour to me, since I was such a nice lady; he would not do it for anyone else. I was short of the necessary amount by two and a half rubles! I could almost have wept with frustration. But in my misery a most unexpected circumstance came to my aid.

Not far from me, at another table of books, I saw old man Pokrovsky. He was surrounded by four or five stallowners; they had succeeded in utterly bewildering him, bothering him to death. Each of them was offering him his wares, and what was there not on offer, and what did he not wish to buy! The poor old man stood in their midst like one of the downtrodden, at a loss to know what to do with all that was being offered him. I went up to him and asked him what he was doing here. The old man was very glad to see me; he was fond of me to the point of distraction, perhaps no less fond than he was of Petenka. 'Oh, I'm buying some books, Varvara Alekseyevna,' he replied to me. 'I'm buying some books for Petenka. You see, it's his birthday soon, and he likes books, so I'm buying some for him...' The old man always expressed himself in a comical sort of way, and now, what was more, he was in the most dreadful state of confusion. Whatever he asked the price of, it was always one silver ruble, two or three silver rubles; he had by this time given up asking the prices of the larger books, but was merely throwing a covetous glance at them, turning over their pages with his fingers, feeling them in his hands and putting them back in their places. 'No, no, that's too expensive,' he would say in a low voice, 'but perhaps over here there'll be something,' and at that point he would begin to rummage through thin folios, songbooks and almanacs; these were all very cheap. 'But why do you want to buy things like that?' I asked him. 'They're all the most terrible rubbish.' 'Oh no,' he replied, 'no, just look at what nice books there are here; very, very nice books!' These last words he drawled in a singsong voice so plaintively that he seemed on the point of bursting into tears with

frustration that the 'nice books' were so expensive; I thought that at any moment a tear would roll down his pale cheeks on to his red nose. I asked him if he had much money. 'Look, here's what I have,' he said, taking out all his money, wrapped up in a greasy scrap of newspaper. 'I've half a ruble, a twenty-copeck bit and twenty copecks in copper.' I immediately hauled him off to my secondhand bookseller. 'Here,' I said, 'these eleven books only cost thirty-two and a half rubles; I have thirty; if you add two and a half we can buy all these books and give them to your son together.' The old man nearly fainted with joy, emptied out all his money, and the bookseller loaded on to him the whole of our common library. My old man filled all his pockets with books, took some in his hands, and the rest under his arms, and carried them all off to his home, having promised to bring them all to me in secret the following day.

On the following afternoon the old man came to visit his son, sat with him for an hour or so as he usually did, then looked in to see us and sat down beside me with a most comical enigmatic expression. First, with a smile, and rubbing his hands with proud satisfaction at being in possession of a confidentiality, he told me that all the books had been brought to us in the greatest secrecy and were being kept in a corner of the kitchen under Matryona's supervision. Then the conversation naturally turned to the day we were waiting for; the old man talked for some time about how we would present the gift, and the more deeply he became engrossed in his subject, the more obvious it became to me that he had something on his mind, something he was unable, did not dare, was even afraid to talk about. I bided my time and remained silent. The secret joy, the secret satisfaction which I had had no difficulty in reading from his strange mannerisms, his grimaces, his winking of his left eye, had vanished. From moment to moment he was becoming more and more restless and uneasy; finally he could restrain himself no longer.

'Listen,' he began timidly, in a low voice. 'Listen, Varvara Alekseyevna... Do you know what, Varvara Alekseyevna? ...' The old man was in a dreadfully confused state of mind. 'Look: when his birthday arrives, you take ten of the books and give them to him yourself, from you, I mean; then I'll just take the eleventh one and give it to him from me, separately, as it were; that way you will have something to give him, and I will have something to give him.' At this point the old man grew flustered and fell silent. I gave him a quick look; he was awaiting my verdict in timid expectancy. 'But why do you want us to give him our presents separately, Zakhar Petrovich?' 'Well, Varvara Alekseyevna, you see...it's, well, I mean...' In short, the old man grew embarrassed, blushed, unable to finish his sentence or to make any further headway.

'It's like this, you see,' he explained finally. 'I sometimes indulge myself, Varvara Alekseyevna... that's to say, I have to inform you that I am constantly indulging, practically always indulging myself... I follow practices that are unhealthy... that's to say, you know how cold it can get out on the streets, and sometimes, too, there are various troubles that come along, or something unpleasant happens, and sometimes I can't help it, I indulge myself and sometimes drink too much. Petenka doesn't like that at all. You see, Varvara Alekseyevna, he loses his temper, shouts nasty things at me and gives me lectures on how I ought to behave. So you see I want to show him by means of my present that I'm mending my ways and starting to behave decently. It's taken me a long time to save up this money to buy a book, because I hardly ever get any money except for what Petenka gives me sometimes. He knows that. Consequently, when he sees the use to which I have put my money, he will realize that I have done it for him alone.'

I started to feel terribly sorry for the old man. I thought for a moment. He was looking at me uneasily. 'Listen, Zakhar Petrovich,' I said, 'you give him all of them!'

'All of them? You mean all the books?...' 'Yes, all the books.' 'From me?' 'Yes, from you.' 'From me alone? You mean, in my name?' 'Yes, in your name...' I thought I was expressing myself very clearly, but for a long time the old man could not fathom my meaning.

'Well, yes,' he said, after pausing to reflect for a while. 'Yes, that would be very good, but what will you give him, Varvara Alekseyevna?' 'Oh, I won't give him anything.' 'What?' the old man cried in a tone that verged on fear. 'So you won't give Petenka anything, you don't want to give him anything?' Now the fear was real; at that moment I think the old

man would have been prepared to give up his proposal so that I could be enabled to give his son a present. He had a kind heart. I assured the old man that I should be glad to give Petenka something, only I did not wish to deprive him, the father, of doing so. 'If your son is happy,' I added, 'and you are pleased, then I will be pleased too, because secretly in my heart I will feel as though I had also given him the present.' At this the old man grew much calmer. He stayed another two hours with us, but during all that time he was unable to sit still; he kept getting up, fussing about, talking incessantly, playing with Sasha, kissing me on the sly, pinching my arm, and making faces at Anna Fyodorovna when her back was turned. In the end, Anna Fyodorovna chased him out of the house. In short, the old man abandoned himself to his delight to a degree that was probably unprecedented for him.

On the morning of Pokrovsky's birthday the old man appeared at exactly eleven o'clock, having come straight from church, his overcoat properly darned, and wearing, as he had promised, a new waistcoat and new boots. He had a bundle of books under both arms. Just then we were all sitting in Anna Fyodorovna's drawing-room having coffee (it was Sunday). I think the old man started off by saying that Pushkin was a very good poet; then, losing his thread and becoming confused, he suddenly changed the subject and began talking about how it was necessary to behave well, and about how if a person did not behave well, that meant he was self-indulgent; how bad habits could be a man's undoing and destroy him; he even cited several fatal examples of intemperance, and concluded by saying that for some time now he had entirely mended his ways, and that he was presently behaving in an exemplary manner. He said that even previously he had sensed the correctness of his son's admonitions, that he had sensed it all for a long time now and had taken it all to heart, but that only now had he begun to abstain. As a proof of this, he was making his son this gift, bought with money he had managed to save over a long period of time.

As I listened to the poor old man I was unable to keep myself from both laughter and tears; he certainly knew how to tell a lie when the occasion demanded! The books were taken into Pokrovsky's room and placed on one of the shelves. Pokrovsky immediately guessed the true state of affairs. The old man was invited to stay to dinner. We were all in such lively spirits that day. After dinner we played cards and forfeits; Sasha was in a playful, excited mood, and I was not much better. Pokrovsky was affectionate to me, and kept trying to find an opportunity of speaking to me alone, but I would not yield to his wishes. That was the best day of that entire four-year period of my life.

But now it is the sad, painful memories that come to mind; the story of my dark days is beginning. Perhaps that is why my pen is starting to move more slowly, as if it were refusing to write any more. That is why, perhaps, I have with such enthusiasm and such fondness gone over in my mind the most insignificant details of my insignificant life in those happy days of mine. They were so brief, those days; they were succeeded by sorrow, black sorrow, and God alone knows when it will end.

My misfortunes began with Pokrovsky's illness and death.

He fell ill two months after the latest events I have described. During those two months he had been tirelessly waging a struggle for the means of subsistence, for he still had no reliable position. He was offered a schoolmaster's job somewhere; but he had an aversion for that trade. He was unable, on account of his poor health, to serve in a government position anywhere. In addition, he would have had to wait too long for the first instalment of his salary. In short, Pokrovsky met with lack of success wherever he turned; he was losing his good spirits. His health was going from bad to worse, but he gave it no attention. Every day he would go out in his thin overcoat to chase up his business, to ask and beg for a job somewhere, anywhere – something that caused him inner torture; he would get his feet wet, be soaked in the rain and, at last, had to take to his bed, from which he never got up again... He died in the depths of autumn, at the end of October.

I practically never left his room throughout the entire duration of his illness, looking after him and nursing him. I frequently did not sleep for whole nights on end. He was seldom in possession of his faculties; frequently he would be in delirium; he would talk about God knows what; his job, his books, about me, about his father... at this time, too, I heard

much about his circumstances which previously I had not known and had not even guessed. During the early period of his illness everyone used to give me rather strange looks; Anna Fyodorovna would shake her head. But I used to look everyone straight in the eye, and they stopped frowning upon my concern for Pokrovsky – or at least Mother did.

Sometimes Pokrovsky would recognize me, but this was rare. For much the greater part of the time he was unconscious. Sometimes for whole nights on end he would talk to someone at great length, his words unclear and obscure, his hoarse voice resonating hollowly in his cramped room as in a coffin; at such times I would grow afraid. On his last night, in particular, he was like a man in a frenzy; he suffered horribly, in a misery of anguish; his groans tormented my soul. Everyone in the house was in a state of fright. Anna Fyodorovna kept praying that God would take him quickly. The doctor was summoned. The doctor said that by morning the patient would certainly be dead.

Old man Pokrovsky spent the whole night out in the passage, right by the door to his son's room; some bast-matting had been spread on the floor for him there. Every minute or so he would enter the room; it was terrible to see him. So crushed by grief was he that he seemed completely inane and insensate. His head shook with fear. He was quivering all over, and kept whispering something to himself, carrying on some private argument with himself. I thought he might go crazy with grief.

Towards dawn, worn out by mental agony, the old man fell into an inert torpor. At some time between seven and eight in the morning the son's death throes began; I woke the father. Pokrovsky was fully conscious, and said farewell to all of us. It was strange; I could not weep, but my soul was torn to pieces.

It was, however, his last moments which caused me the greatest degree of anguish and torture. With his stiffening tongue he kept asking for something over and over again, but I could not make out any of his words. My heart nearly broke with affliction. For a whole hour he was restless, kept fretting about something, trying to make some sign or other with his frigid hands, and then once more began plaintively asking for something in a hoarse, hollow voice; but his words came out as incoherent sounds, and once again I was unable to make out what he was trying to say. I brought every member of our household to his bedside, I gave him water to drink, but all he did was keep sadly shaking his head. At last I realized what he wanted. He was asking me to draw the window-curtain and open the shutters, probably in a desire to take one last look at the day, at God's world and the sun. I tugged the curtain to one side; but the incipient day was sad and melancholy, like the poor, fading life of the dying man. There was no sun. The clouds had spread the sky with a misty shroud; it was so rainy, gloomy, melancholy, that sky. A drizzling rain had found its way to the window-panes and was sluicing them with rivulets of cold, dirty water; all was dark and dreary. The wan daylight only just managed to penetrate the room, scarcely vying with the trembling glow of the lamp that had been lit in front of the icon. The dying man gave me a look of utter melancholy and shook his head. A minute later he was dead.

The arrangements for the funeral were made personally by Anna Fyodorovna. A coffin of the very plainest kind was bought, and a drayman hired. In order to meet the expenses, Anna Fyodorovna laid claim to all the dead man's books and personal effects. The old man argued with her, kicked up a row, took back from her as many books as he could, stuffed all his pockets with them, put them into his hat, or wherever else he could think of, went around with them for a whole three days and would not even part with them when he had to go to church. For all those days he was like someone unconscious, like someone who has been stupefied, and kept fussing near the coffin with a strange solicitude: now he would straighten the wreath on the corpse, now he would light or snuff the candles. It was evident that his thoughts could not rest on anything in an ordered manner. Neither Mother nor Anna Fyodorovna were present in the church during the funeral service. Mother was sick, and Anna Fyodorovna, though she had got herself all ready to go, had quarrelled with old man Pokrovsky and had remained at home. The only people present were the old man and myself. During the service I was attacked by a sense of terror – a kind of premonition of the future. I could barely manage to stay on my feet in church. Finally the coffin was shut, nailed up, placed in the drayman's cart and hauled away. I accompanied it only to the end of the street. The drayman was making his horse go at a trot. The old man ran after him,

weeping loudly, his wailing shaken and punctuated by his running. The poor fellow had lost his hat and had not stopped to pick it up. His hair was sodden with rain; the wind was getting up; the sleet was lashing and stinging his face. The old man seemed insensible to the foul weather, and ran wailing from one side of the cart to the other. The skirts of his threadbare coat fluttered in the wind like wings. Books peeped from every one of his pockets; in his arms he was carrying an enormous tome, to which he clung tightly. Passers-by would remove their hats and cross themselves. Some people stopped and stared in wonder at the poor old man. Every so often books would fall out of his pockets and land in the mud. People would stop and point to them; he would pick them up and then scramble off in pursuit of the coffin once more. At the corner of the street an old beggar woman tagged along after him, keeping him company. At last the cart turned the corner and disappeared from view. I went home. When I got there, I threw myself on Mother's breast in a terrible state of anguish. I pressed her in my arms as close as I possibly could, kissed her and sobbed violently, anxiously nestling against her as though in my embraces seeking to retain my last friend, and not surrender her to death. But death was already overshadowing poor Mother...

June 11

How grateful I am to you for our walk to the islands yesterday, Makar Alekseyevich! How fresh and pleasant it is there, such greenness! It is so long since I saw green nature; when I was ill I kept thinking that I was going to die, and that my death was certain; imagine, then, what I experienced yesterday, how I felt! Do not be too cross with me for being so sad yesterday; I felt very good, very much at ease – but for some reason at those moments of my life when I feel best I am always sad. As for my crying, that was just nonsense; I myself do not know why I am forever crying. My emotions are painful and exasperating; I have a morbid sensibility. The sky was pale and cloudless, the sun was setting, the evening was quiet – all that – yet I do not know how it was: yesterday my mood made me experience everything as being painful and tormenting, so that my heart overflowed and my soul begged for tears. But why am I writing you all this? These are things that communicate themselves to the heart only with difficulty, and to communicate them to others is even harder. But you, perhaps, will understand me. Sadness and laughter at the same time! Truly, what a good man you are, Makar Alekseyevich! Yesterday you really looked into my eyes in order to read in them what I was feeling, and you were delighted by my enthusiasm. Whether it was a shrub, an avenue of trees, or a stretch of water – you were there; so nobly you stood before me, making yourself look handsome, and constantly glancing into my eyes as though you were showing me your estate. That proves you have a good heart, Makar Alekseyevich. It is for that that I love you. Well, goodbye. I'm not well again today; yesterday I got my feet wet and have caught a cold; Fedora is also unwell with something, so together we make a pair of invalids. Do not forget me, come and see me more often.

Your

V. D.

June 12

Varvara Alekseyevna, my little dove,

Why, little mother, there was I thinking you were going to describe everything we saw yesterday in proper verses, yet all you have produced is one single small sheet of prose. I say this because although you do not say much in your little letter, it is none the less uncommonly well and pleasingly described. The natural surroundings, the various rural scenes, and all the rest about feelings – you really have described all that very well. You see, I have no talent for that kind of thing. Even though I fill ten pages with my scribbling, nothing comes of it. I am unable to describe anything. I have already tried. My dear, you tell me that I am a good man, lacking in malice, incapable of harming his fellow creatures and possessing an understanding of the Lord is grace as it is manifested in nature, and you end by showering me with various forms of praise. All that is true, little mother, all that is completely true; I really am as you say, I know it myself;

but when a man reads the kind of thing you write, his heart is moved, and then various painful thoughts come into his mind. But now listen to me, little mother, while I tell you something, my dear.

I was only seventeen when I first went into the service – soon I will have spent more than thirty years in this walk of life. Well, indeed, I have worn out enough dress uniforms in my time; I have grown to man's estate, acquired some shrewdness, and seen something of people; I have lived, and I can say that I have lived in the world, to the extent that once I was even nominated to receive a medal. Perhaps you will not believe me, but I assure you that this is so. And what became of it, little mother? Evil men brought it all to nothing. But I will tell you, my darling, that even though I may be an ignorant man, a stupid man, my heart is the same as anyone else's. Do you know what an evil man did to me, Varenka? It is shameful to tell what he did – you will ask why he did it. He did it because I am a meek little soul, because I am a quiet, a good little soul! I did not appeal to his taste, and so he let fly at me. It began with him saying things to me like 'You are this and that, Makar Alekseyevich'; then this turned into: 'Oh, it is no good asking Makar Alekseyevich!' And finally this became: 'It's all Makar Alekseyevich is fault, of course.' You see, my darling, how it went; everything was laid at Makar Alekseyevich's door; the name of Makar Alekseyevich became a watchword throughout our entire department. And it was not enough that they made me into a watchword, into a term of abuse, almost – they latched on to my boots, my uniform, my hair, the shape of my body: none of these were to their liking, they must all be changed. And I mean, all this has been repeated every single day of the week since God knows when. I have grown accustomed to it, because I can grow accustomed to anything, because I am a meek man, because I am a little man; but, I ask, what is the reason for it all? What wrong have I ever done anyone? Have I stolen promotion from anyone? Have I ever slandered anyone to the higher-ups? Asked for a bonus I did not deserve? Made up tales? It would be unjust of you even to think of such a thing, little mother. Why would I ever do anything like that? Just look at me, my darling. Do I look as though I had a leaning for perfidy and ambition? So why have such disasters befallen me, in the name of God? After all, you consider me a worthy man, and you are immeasurably better than all of them, little mother. I mean, what is the greatest civic virtue? Yevstafy Ivanovich said the other day in a private conversation I had with him that the most important civic virtue is to know how to make a lot of money. He said, jokingly (I know he was joking), that moral education consists merely in learning how not to be a burden on anyone; and I'm not a burden on anyone! My crust of bread is my own; it's true that it's a plain crust of bread, at times even a dry one; but there it is, earned by my labours and consumed lawfully and unexceptionably. Well, what can one do? I mean, I know that the copying I do is not much of a job; yet, even so, I am proud of it: I work in the sweat of my brow. So what is wrong with the fact that I earn my living by copying? Is copying a sin? 'He just copies documents,' they say. 'That rat of a government clerk makes his living by copying!' Yet what is dishonourable about it? My handwriting is clear, well-formed and pleasant to look at, and His Excellency is satisfied with it; I copy his most important documents for him. Of course, I have no literary style, I mean, I know I have none, curse it; that is why I have not succeeded in rising in the service, and why even now, my darling, I write to you in this plain manner, with no frills, just as the thoughts come into my heart... All this I know; and indeed, if everyone were to start being an author, who would do the copying? That is the question I ask you, and I beg you to answer it, little mother. Well, so now I am aware that I am necessary, that I am indispensable, and that a man is silly to be upset by non sense. All right, let me be a rat, since they've found a resemblance! But this rat is needed, this rat is of use, this rat is relied upon, and this rat receives a bonus – that's the sort of rat it's! But enough of this subject, my darling; I did not really wish to speak of it, but got carried away a little in the heat of the moment. All the same, it is pleasant to do oneself justice from time to time. Goodbye, my darling, my little dove, my kind consoler! I will come and see you, I promise I will; I shall call on you, my treasure. And in the meantime, don't pine. I shall bring you a book. Well, goodbye, Varenka.

Your affectionate well-wisher,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

June 20

Makar Alekseyevich, Sir,

I write to you in haste, I am in a hurry, trying to finish some work on time. Look, this is what I have to tell you; it is possible for you to make an advantageous purchase. Fedora says that a man-friend of hers is selling a dress uniform, as good as new, some underwear, a waistcoat and a cap, and all for practically nothing, she says; so why don't you buy them? After all, you are not too badly off just now, you have some money; you yourself have told me so. Enough of your miserliness, now, please: I mean to say, these are all essential items. Just take a look at yourself, at the old clothes you are going about in. Shame on you! They are covered in patches. You have no new things; I know you have none, even though you assure me that you have. Heaven only knows what you have done with them. So please do as I say, and buy these clothes. Do it for me; if you love me, then buy them.

You have sent me a gift of some linen; but listen, Makar Alekseyevich, you are ruining yourself. I mean, it's no joke, what you have spent on me – a fearful amount of money! Oh, how you love to be extravagant! I don't need all those things; they were quite unnecessary. I know that you love me, I am convinced of it; truly, it is superfluous to remind me of it with gifts, gifts which it is painful for me to accept from you, since I know how much they cost you. Once and for all – desist, do you hear? I beg you, I implore you. Makar Alekseyevich, you ask me to send you the continuation of my notes; you want me to finish them. I do not even know how I managed to write what I did! But I have not the strength now to talk about my past; I don't even want to think about it; I grow frightened by all those memories. Talking about my poor mother, who left her poor child in the clutches of those monsters is most painful of all to me. My heart bleeds at the mere recollection. All that is still so fresh in my memory; I have not had time to reflect, still less to compose myself, even though it all happened more than a year ago. But you know all about it.

I told you about the thoughts that are currently in Anna Fyodorovna's head; she is accusing me of ingratitude and will accept no blame for her association with Mr Bykov. She wants me to go and live in her house; she says that I am living on charity, that I am on the slippery slope. She says that if I return to her she will take it upon herself to sort out everything with Mr Bykov and compel him to make amends for all that he has done to me. She says that Mr Bykov wants to give me a dowry. Let them be! I am just as happy here with you, near my good Fedora, who with her devotion to me reminds me of my old dead nurse. Even though you are only a distant relative of mine, you protect me with your name. As for them, I don't know them; I shall put them out of my mind if I can. What more do they want of me? Fedora says that it is all just gossip, that they will eventually leave me alone. Pray God she is right!

V. D.

June 21

My dove, little mother!

I want to write to you, but don't know how to start. I mean, it's so strange that we are living so close to each other now. I say this because I have never before spent my days in such delight. My, it is as if the Lord had blessed me with a home and family! My child, my pretty little one! What is this you write about the four chemises I sent you? After all, you needed them – I discovered that from Fedora. Pleasing you is an especial happiness for me, little mother; that is my pleasure, and you must leave me to it, little mother; do not come near me and do not gainsay me. Never have I experienced anything like this, little mother. I have launched myself into society now. For one thing, I am living at double intensity, because you are living so close to me and making me so happy; for another, I have been invited to tea today by one of the lodgers, my neighbour, Ratazyayev, the same clerk who holds the literary evenings. There is to be one of those today; we are going to read literature. So you see how I am now, little mother – you see! Well, goodbye. I've really just written this without any particular purpose and solely in order to let you know how well I am. My darling, you told Teresa to tell me that you needed some coloured silk for your embroidery; I shall buy it, little mother, I shall buy you

the silk, too. Tomorrow I shall have the pleasure of being able to satisfy you. I even know where to buy it. But for the moment I remain

Your sincere friend,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

June 22

Varvara Alekseyevna, Madam,

I must inform you, my dear lady, that a most doleful event has taken place in our lodging-house, one that is truly, truly worthy of compassion! This morning, at about five a.m., Gorshkov's small son died, I do not know what of; possibly it was some form of scarlet fever, but God alone knows! I paid a visit to those Gorshkovs. Oh, little mother, what poverty they live in! And what chaos! And it's no wonder: the entire family lives in one room, which they have divided up with screens for the sake of propriety. They already have a little coffin prepared – a simple one, but quite pretty; they bought it ready-made, the boy was about nine; they say he had promise. But it is pitiful to see them, Varenka! The mother does not cry, but she is so sad, so poor. Perhaps things will be easier for them now that they have got one off their shoulders; but they still have the other two, a boy infant in arms and a little girl who must be six and a bit. There's not really much that's pleasant about watching a child, one's own child, suffer and not being able to do anything about it. The father sits on a broken chair, wearing an old, grease-stained jacket. The tears stream down his face, perhaps not from grief, however, but simply from habit – his eyes are festering. What a queer fellow he is! He keeps blushing when you talk to him, he grows confused and doesn't know what to say. The little girl, the daughter, stood leaning against the coffin – such a sad, thoughtful child, poor thing! I don't like it when children are thoughtful, Varenka, little mother; it's an unpleasant sight! There was some kind of rag-doll lying on the floor beside her – she wasn't playing with it; she had her finger in her mouth, and just stood there, without making the slightest motion. The landlady gave her a sweet; she took it, but did not eat it. That was sad, Varenka, wasn't it?

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

June 25

My dear Makar Alekseyevich!

I am returning your book to you. It is a thoroughly worthless little item! – and not fit for decent eyes, either. Where did you manage to dig up such a treasure? Joking apart, I wonder if you really like such books, Makar Alekseyevich? The other day I was promised something to read. If you like, I will share it with you. But now goodbye. Truly, I have no time to write more.

V. D.

June 26

Dear Varenka,

The fact is that, to tell you the truth, little mother, I have not read that unpleasant book. To be sure, I did glance at a bit of it, and saw that it was whimsical stuff, written solely for buffoonery's sake, in order to make people laugh; well, I thought, it must really be funny; perhaps Varenka will like it, too; and so I bought it and sent it to you.

But here, Ratazyayev has promised to lend me some real literary stuff to read, so now you, too, shall have some books, little mother. Ratazyayev knows his onions, he's a connoisseur; he writes himself. O, how he writes! He has a bold pen and oceans of style; in his each and every word, I mean – each one of them – in the most trivial, the most ordinary,

vile word of the sort I might sometimes say to Faldoni or Teresa, he has style. I attend the evenings he holds in his room, too. We smoke tobacco, and he reads to us, reads for nearly five hours at a stretch and we listen all the time. It's not literature at all, it's a feast! It's so lovely: like flowers, just like flowers; one can gather a bouquet from every page! He's such a pleasant fellow, so kind and affectionate. Well, what am I compared to him, eh? Nothing. he is a man with a reputation, and what am I? Compared to him, I simply don't exist; yet even for me he has a kind word. I'm doing some copying for him. Now, Varenka, don't go thinking that there's some sort of trick here, that he's only kind to me because I'm doing his copying for him. Don't believe gossip, little mother, don't believe wicked gossip! No, I'm doing it of my own free will, because I want to please him, and if he is kind to me, then that is because he wants to please me. I understand the delicate nature of an action, little mother. he is a good-hearted, a very good-hearted man, and a peerless writer.

Oh, literature is a wonderful thing, Varenka, a very wonderful thing; I discovered that from being with those people the day before yesterday. It is a profound thing! It strengthens people's hearts and instructs them, and – there are various other things about it all in a little book they have. It's marvellously written! Literature is a picture, or rather in a certain sense both a picture and a mirror; it is an expression of emotion, a subtle form of criticism, a didactic lesson and a document. All that I gleaned from being with them. I will tell you quite honestly, little mother, that as I sit among them listening (I even smoke a pipe as they do, what do you think of that?), and they begin to contend and argue with one another about various matters, I simply have to declare my insufficiency – that is all that you or I, little mother, could possibly do in this setting. In this setting I am simply a dunce, an ignoramus; I am ashamed of myself, and I spend the entire evening trying to think of some little contribution to make to the general discussion, yet am unable to do even that! And then, Varenka, I feel sorry for myself, sorry that I am not as they are; that, according to the proverb, I've 'grown in size but not in mind'. For what do I do in my free time now? I sleep, fool that I am. Yet instead of indulging in sleep I don't need, I might be doing something agreeable; like sitting down and writing something. An activity useful to myself and pleasing to others. Goodness, little mother, you should just see how much money they get for it, may the Lord forgive them! Look at Ratazyayev, even – what a lot he earns! What effort does it cost him to write a printer's sheet of prose? Indeed, some days he writes five, and he says he gets three hundred rubles a sheet. He'll produce some little anecdote or other, or an account of some curious event, and for that it'll cost you five hundred, which you'd better fork out, even if it bankrupts you, because if you don't, it's a thousand we'll be putting away in our pocket next time! What do you think of that, Varvara Alekseyevna? I mean, he has a little exercise-book of poems – they're not very long poems – and he's asking seven thousand for them, little mother, seven thousand, just imagine. I mean, that is real estate, it's a capital-investment property! He says they're offering him five thousand, but he won't take it. I've tried to reason with him, take their five thousand, man, I tell him, and spit in their faces – after all, five thousand is money, isn't it? No, he says, let them give me seven, the swindlers. He really is a clever chap!

You know, little mother, since we're on the subject, I think I shall copy out a little extract from *Italian Passions* for you. That's the title of one of his books. Here, read this passage, Varenka, and be your own judge:

... Vladimir quivered, his passions bubbled up furiously inside him, and his blood seethed...

'Countess,' he cried. 'Countess! Have you any idea how terrible is this passion, how infinite this madness? No, my dreams did not deceive me! I love you, I love you ecstatically, wildly, insanely! Not all your husband's blood will quench the furious, bubbling ecstasy of my soul! Paltry obstacles cannot impede the all-consuming, infernal conflagration that harrows my exhausted breast. O Zinaida, Zinaida! . . '

'Vladimir!' the countess whispered, beside herself, leaning against his shoulder...

'Zinaida!' cried the ecstatic Smelsky.

His breast exhaled a sigh. The fire leapt up with a bright flame on the altar of love and harrowed the breasts of the unhappy victims.

'Vladimir!...' the Countess whispered in rapture. Her bosom heaved, her cheeks burned crimson, her eyes were aflame...

The new and terrible union was consummated!

Half an hour later the old Count entered his wife's boudoir.

'Now, my dear, what about having the samovar lit for our dear guest?' he said, giving her a pat on the cheek.

Well, little mother, having read that, what do you think? It's a little on the free-and-easy side, that is certain, but it's

good none the less. And what's good is good, you can't say it isn't. And now, if you will permit me, I shall copy out for you another little extract, this time from his novella *Yermak and Suleika*.

The gist of the story, little mother, is that the Cossack Yermak, the fierce and terrible conqueror of Siberia, has fallen in love with Suleika, who is the daughter of the Siberian Tsar Kuchum, and who has been taken captive by him. An event straight from the times of Ivan the Terrible, as you will be aware. Here is the dialogue of Yermak and Suleika:

'Tell me that you love me, Suleika! O tell me, tell me that you do!'

'I love you, Yermak,' Suleika whispered.

'By the earth and all the heavens, I thank you! I am happy! . . . You have given me all, all for which my storm-tossed spirit has striven ever since I was a lad. So it is hither you have led me, my guiding star; so this is why you have led me hither, beyond the Kamenny Poyas.⁴ I will show my Suleika to the whole world, and men, those ferocious monsters, will not dare to accuse me! Oh, if they understood those secret sufferings of her tender soul, if they were able to see an entire poem in one single tear of my Suleika! O, let me brush away that tear with kisses, let me drink it, that divine tear... woman not of this world!'

'Yermak,' Suleika said, 'the world is wicked, men are unjust! They will persecute us, they will condemn us, my dear Yermak! What will a poor maiden, who grew up in her father's yurt amidst the snows of her native Siberia, do in your cold, icy, heartless, vain world? People will not understand me, O my desire, my loved one!'

'Then the Cossack sabre will be raised, whistling, above them!' Yermak shouted, his eyes rolling wildly.

Now, Varenka, what do you think of this bit about Yermak when he finds out that his Suleika has had her throat cut? The blind old man Kuchum has stolen into Yermak's tent in his absence, under cover of darkness, and has cut his own daughter's throat, out of a desire to deal a mortal blow to Yermak, who has done him out of his sceptre and crown:

'I take joy in scraping iron against stone!' Yermak cried in a state of savage frenzy, whetting his damask steel dagger on the shaman's stone. 'I must have their blood, their blood! They must be carved, cut up and quartered!!'

And after all that Yermak, unable to go on living without his Suleika, throws himself into the Irtysh, and there the story ends.

Well, and here is a little extract, an example of the humorous-descriptive genre, written specifically in order to make people laugh:

Do you know Ivan Prokofyevich Yellowbelly? You know, the one who bit Prokofy Ivanovich's leg. Ivan Prokofyevich is a man of abrupt temper, but he has some rare virtues; Prokofy Ivanovich, on the other hand, is extremely fond of black radishes with honey. Now, when Pelageya Antonovna used to be friendly with him... You know Pelageya Antonovna, don't you? The one who always puts her skirt on inside out?

I mean, that's killing, Varenka, simply killing! We rolled about with laughter when he read us that. He's such a one, may the Lord forgive him! But you know, Varenka, although it's a bit fanciful and rather too frivolous, it's none the less innocent, without the slightest trace of free-thinking or liberal ideas. I should observe, little mother, that Ratazyayev is a man of impeccable behaviour and is for that reason a first-rate author – not like some other authors I could mention.

You know, sometimes I have an idea... well, what if I were to write something, what would come of it? Say, for example, that quite suddenly, for no particular reason, a book were to appear with the title *The Poems of Makar Devushkin*? Well, what would you say then, my little angel? How would that seem to you, what would you think? As for myself, I can tell you, little mother, that as soon as my book appeared, I should certainly not dare to show my face on the Nevsky Prospekt. I mean, just think what it would be like when everyone said: 'There's the literary author and poet Devushkin', or 'There is Devushkin'! When that happened, what would I do about my boots, for example? They're nearly always – I mention this in passing, little mother – covered in patches, and I have to tell you also that their soles sometimes hang open in a most unseemly manner. Well, what would happen if everyone found out that the author Devushkin's boots were covered in patches? What if some countess or duchess or other were to learn of it – what would she say, the darling? She probably would not notice it; for, the way I imagine it, countesses don't concern themselves with boots, particularly the boots of government clerks (because there are boots and boots, after all) – but she would be told about it, her friends would give me away. Yes, Ratazyayev would be the first to give me away; he would call on the Countess V.; he says he's invited to every one of her receptions, and that he is almost like one of the family. She's a real darling, he says; literary, he says, a real lady. He's a rascal, that Ratazyayev!

But, anyway, enough of this topic: I'm really just writing all this for fun, my little angel, in order to entertain you. Goodbye, my little dove! If I've scribbled you a lot it's because I'm in such a happy frame of mind today. We all ate dinner together in Ratazyayev's room and they started passing round a Romany wine* such as you've never tasted in your life (they're such frolicsome fellows, little mother!)... But why should I write to you about that? Now don't go getting the wrong idea about me, Varenka. I just tell you all these things for fun. I shall send you the books, I promise I shall... There's a novel by Paul de Kock* going the rounds among us here, but I shall not send you Paul de Kock, little mother... No, no! Paul de Kock isn't good enough for you. They say about him, little mother, that he provokes all the St Petersburg critics to righteous indignation. I enclose a pound of sweets – I bought them especially for you. Eat them, my darling, and remember me each time you put one in your mouth. Only mind and suck the boiled sweets, and not crunch them, or else you will get toothache. Perhaps you like candied fruit? Do write and tell me. Well, goodbye, then, goodbye. May Christ be with you, my little dove. And I shall remain forever

Your most faithful friend,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

June 27

Makar Alekseyevich, Sir,

Fedora says that if I am willing, there are certain people who will be pleased to take an active interest in my position, and will obtain for me a very good post as governess in a certain house. What do you think, my friend – should I accept or not? Of course, I should not then be a burden on you any longer, and the post does seem to be an advantageous one; on the other hand, though, I do not feel good about entering a house of people whom I do not know. They are some kind of country landowners. If they start trying to find out about me, asking me questions, probing me – what shall I say? Then again, I'm so shy and unsociable; I like to go on living for a long time in the same familiar corner. It's somehow better living in the place one's used to: even though one's miserable half the time, it's still better. The place is in the country, what's more; and heaven only knows what sort of duties I will have; perhaps they'll just make me look after the children. And they're such people, too: they've had three governesses in two years. For the love of God, tell me what you think, Makar Alekseyevich, should I accept or not? And why do you never visit me? It's so seldom that you show your face. We hardly ever see each other except in church on Sundays. What an unsociable fellow you are! You're just like I am. I'm nearly a relation of yours, you know. You don't love me, Makar Alekseyevich, and I sometimes get very sad on my own. At times, especially when it's getting dark, I find myself sitting alone as alone can be. Fedora will have gone off somewhere. I sit and think and think – I remember all the old times, the joyful ones and the sad ones, and they all pass before my eyes, flickering as through a mist. Familiar faces appear (I almost begin to see them for real), and it is Mother whom I see most frequently... And what dreams I have! I have a feeling that my health is not as good as it should be; I am so weak; this morning, for example, when I got out of bed, I started to feel peculiar; on top of that I have such a bad cough! I feel – indeed I know – that I shall die soon. Will anyone give me a funeral? Will anyone walk behind my coffin? Will anyone miss me?... And now, perhaps, I shall have to live in a strange place, in an alien corner of someone else's house... O my God, how sad life is, Makar Alekseyevich! Why do you keep stuffing me with sweets, my friend? I really don't know where you get all the money from. Oh, my friend, look after your money, for God's sake look after it. Fedora is selling the rug I have made; she can get fifty paper rubles for it. That's very good; I had thought it would be less. I shall give Fedora three silver rubles and make myself a new dress – a simple, warm one. I shall make you a waistcoat, I shall make it myself, and shall choose a good material for it.

Fedora has brought me a book – *Tales of Belkin** – which I shall send you if you would like to read it. Only please don't get marks on it, or delay in returning it, as it belongs to somebody else. It's a work by Pushkin. Two years ago Mother and I read the stories in it together, and I felt so sad reading them over again now. If you have any books, please

send them to me – only not if they are ones you have got from Ratazyayev. He will probably lend you his own books, if he has had anything published. How can you like his stuff, Makar Alekseyevich? It's such rubbish... Well, goodbye! How I have prattled on! When I'm sad I like to prattle about nothing in particular. It's a kind of medicine: I at once feel better, especially if I am able to talk about everything that is in my heart. Goodbye, goodbye, my friend!

Your

V. D.

June 28

Varvara Alekseyevna, little mother,

Enough of this misery! You ought to be ashamed of yourself! Enough, my little angel; how is it that such thoughts come into your head? You are not ill, my darling, you are not in the slightest ill; you are blossoming, positively blossoming; a little pale, perhaps, but blossoming all the same. And what are these dreams and visions of yours? Shame on you, my little dove – enough! You must spit in the face of those dreams, yes, spit in their face. Why do you suppose I sleep well? Why do you suppose that nothing bad happens to me? You ought to look at me, little mother. I take care of myself, sleep well, am in good health, a fine figure of a man, a pleasure to look at. Enough, little darling, enough – shame on you. You must mend your ways. After all, I know how that head of yours works, little mother – as soon as the slightest thing goes wrong you start dreaming and pining. Stop it for my sake, darling. Go into service? Never! No, no and no! What can you be thinking of, whatever has got into you? And in the country, too! Oh no, little mother, I shall not permit it. I shall exert every power at my disposal in order to oppose such a plan. I will sell my old jacket and go about the streets in my shirtsleeves rather than have you want for anything. No, Varenka, no; I know you! This is folly, pure folly! And if there is one thing that's certain, it is that Fedora bears the sole responsibility: she is quite clearly a stupid peasant woman, and it is she who has put you up to all this. Don't you believe a word she says, little mother. You don't know much about her, do you, my darling?... She's a stupid peasant woman, foolish and quarrelsome; she drove her husband into his grave. Or has she been making you lose your temper with her over there? No, no, little mother, not for anything in the world! What would happen to me if you went, what would be left for me? No, Varenka, darling, you must get this idea out of your little head. What do you lack with us? We dote upon you, you are fond of us – sogo on living over there in your quiet way; sew or read, or, if you wish, don't sew – it's all the same, just as long as you go on living with us. Just think for yourself what life would be like here without you!... Look, I shall get some books for you, and then perhaps we'll go and take another walk somewhere together. Only enough, enough, little mother: learn some sense and don't be put off your balance by silly nonsense! I will come and visit you, and in a very short time, too; only in return you must accept my frank and honest opinion: you are wrong, my darling, you are very wrong! I, of course, am an uneducated man and know that I am uneducated, that I was brought up on a shoestring; but that is not what I am driving at, for it is not I who am at issue here, but Ratazyayev, whose side I shall take, say what you will. he is my friend, and so I take his part. He writes well, he writes very, very, very well. I do not agree with you, and there is no way in which I can agree with you. He writes floridly, in gusts, with figures of speech and all sorts of ideas; it's very fine! I think, Varenka, you must have read it without feeling, or perhaps you weren't in the right mood, you were angry with Fedora about something, or something unpleasant had happened over there. No, you read it again with feeling, preferably when you're happy and content and in a good mood, as when, for example, you have a sweet in your mouth – that's the time you should read it. I don't deny (and who would?) that there are writers who are better, even much better than Ratazyayev, but they have their good points, and so does Ratazyayev; they write well, and so does he. he is a law unto himself, he writes in his own way, and what he writes he writes very well. Well, goodbye; I can write no more; I must make haste, for duty calls. See to it now, little mother, beloved little darling, compose yourself, may the Lord be with you, and I remain

your faithful friend,

PS Thank you for the book, my dear; we shall read Pushkin, too; and I promise to come and visit you this evening.

1 July

My dear Makar Alekseyevich,

No, my friend, no, this is no life for me, here among you. I have given the matter some thought and have decided that it would be very wrong of me to refuse such an advantageous post. There I shall at least have my daily bread assured to me; I shall make an effort, I shall earn the good graces of people who are strangers to me, I shall even endeavour to alter my character, if need be. It is, of course, hard and hurtful to live among strangers, to seek their mercy, to hide one's feelings and constrain oneself, but God will help me. I must not remain a stay-at-home all my life. Similar things have happened to me in the past. I remember the days when I was a little girl and used to go to boarding-school. All Sunday I would play around at home, jumping and skipping; from time to time Mother would scold me, but I didn't care – my heart was so full of happiness, my soul was so radiant. Evening would draw near, and then a mortal sadness would descend on me: at nine o' clock I should have to return to my boarding-school, and there everything was cold, alien and strict, the schoolmistresses were so short-tempered on Mondays – my soul would fairly ache, and I would want to cry. I would go into a corner and weep all on my own, concealing my tears, as people would say I was lazy; yet the reason for my crying had nothing to do with the necessity of study. Well, in any case, I grew accustomed to the school, and then I would cry again when I had to leave it and say goodbye to my companions.

I should be acting wrongly to go on being a burden to both of you. That thought is torture to me. I tell you all this frankly, because I am used to being frank with you. Do you think I don't see the way Fedora gets up at the crack of dawn every morning to do her laundry and works until late at night? And old bones need rest, too. Do you think I don't see the way you ruin yourself over me, spending your every last copeck on me? A man of your means, my friend! You write that you will sell the last of your belongings rather than leave me in hardship. I believe you, my friend, I believe in your good heart – but those are just words. Just now you have some money you did not expect to have, you have been paid a bonus; but what will happen later, what then? You know yourself that I am constantly ill; I cannot work as you do, even though I should be truly glad to – and then there is not always work to be found. What is left for me? To let my heart break from sorrow as I watch the two of you, kind souls that you are? How can I render you even the slightest service? And why am I so indispensable to you, my friend? What good have I ever done you? I am merely devoted to you with all my soul, I love you fiercely, strongly, with all my heart, but – O bitter fate! – am able only to love, and not to do good works, to pay you for your unselfishness. Do not try to hold me back any longer, think about what I have written and tell me your final opinion. I remain, in expectation,

your loving

V. D.

July 1

Folly, folly, Varenka, the purest folly! Turn one's back on you for a moment and heaven alone knows what you get into that little head of yours. One thing is not right, and another thing is not right! But I can see now that it is just folly. I mean, what do you lack with us, little mother – just tell me that! We are fond of you, you are fond of us, we are all happy and content – what more could one wish? And in any case, what will you do among these strangers? I don't believe you even know yet what a stranger is!... No, you would do better to ask me, I will tell you a thing or two about what a stranger is. I know him, little mother, I know him well; I have had occasion to eat his bread. He is mean, Varenka, mean, so mean that your little heart will not suffice you, so cruelly will he torment it with his reprimands, reproaches and dirty

looks. Here with us you are warm, you are comfortable – you have found shelter as in a little nest. Why, we shall feel as though we had lost an arm or a leg if you leave. What will we do without you; what will I, old man that I am, do? Do you suppose we do not need you? Do you suppose that you are of no assistance to us? No assistance? How can you think such a thing? No, little mother, consider for yourself: how can you be of no assistance to us? You are of great assistance to me, Varenka. You have such a beneficial influence... See, I am thinking about you now, and it cheers me up... From time to time I write you a letter in which I set forth all my feelings, and receive back a detailed reply from you. I buy you some clothes, I make you a bonnet; sometimes you give me an errand, and I carry it out... No, how can you say you are of no assistance to me? What will I do alone in my old age, what will become of me? Perhaps you have not thought about that, Varenka; but you must think about it – you must say to yourself, what will become of him without me? I have grown accustomed to you, my dear. What will happen otherwise? I shall go down to the Neva, and that will be the end of it. Yes, truly, Varenka, that is what will happen; what else will there remain for me to do with you gone? Oh my darling Varenka! You evidently want the drayman to cart me to the cemetery at Volkovo, with only a mire-sodden old beggar-woman to accompany my coffin, and my grave to be filled in with sand, and my corpse left there alone. That is wrong of you, wrong of you, little mother! Truly, it is wrong of you, well and truly wrong! I am returning your book to you, Varenka, my little friend, and if, my little friend, you ask me my opinion of your book, I shall reply that never in all my life have I read such a wonderful book. And now I ask myself, little mother, how I could possibly have been content to be such a blockhead all my life, may the Lord forgive me. What have I been doing? From what backwoods have I emerged? I mean, I know nothing, little mother, I know nothing at all! I know absolutely nothing! I will tell you with an open heart, Varenka—I am an uneducated man; I have read little until now, very little, practically nothing: *The Picture of Man*,* a clever book; *The Little Bell-ringer*,* and *The Cranes of Ibbicus** – that is all, I have never read any more than that. Now I have read *The Stationmaster** in the book you have sent me here; let me tell you, little mother, it can happen that one spends one's life not realizing that right at one's side there is a book in which one's entire life is set forth as if on the ends of one's fingers. As one begins to read it, one gradually starts to remember and guess and unravel all that was hitherto obscure. And lastly, here is one other reason why I am fond of your book: there are some books which one reads and reads, yet try as one may one can't make head nor tail of them. Take me, for example: I'm stupid, I'm stupid by nature, so I can't read books that are too grand; yet when I read this one, it is as though I had written it myself, just as if, in a manner of speaking, I had taken my own heart, exactly as it is, and turned it inside out so that people could see what was in it, and described it all in detail – that is what it is like! And it is so simple, as God is my witness; but do you know, I really think I should have written it in the same way; why shouldn't I have written it? After all, I have the same feelings, exactly the same ones as are described in the book, and I have sometimes found myself in situations like that of that poor unfortunate fellow Samson Vyrin, for example. How many Samson Vyryns there are going about in our midst, all of them the same poor hapless wretches! And how skilfully it is all described! The tears almost came to my eyes, little mother, when I read the bit where he drinks himself unconscious, the poor sinner, becomes a hopeless drunkard and sleeps all day under his sheepskin coat, staving off his grief with punch and weeping piteously, wiping his eyes with his dirty coat-hem as he remembers his poor lost lamb, his daughter Dunyasha! Oh, that is lifelike! Read it: it is lifelike, it is alive! I have seen it myself – it is what is all around me; Teresa, for example – but has one to look far? Look at our poor clerk – he might very well be Samson Vyrin under another name: *Gorshkov*. It is a matter of common concern, little mother, it might happen to you or to me. Even a count who lives on the Nevsky Prospekt or the Embankment, even he can experience the same thing, and it only appears to be different because they live in their own way, according to the laws of fashion, but even he can experience the same thing – anything can happen, and it can happen to me, too. That is how it is, little mother, and yet here you are wanting to leave us; don't you see, Varenka, that sin may overtake me? You may ruin both yourself and me, my dear. Oh, my darling, for the love of God put all these capricious thoughts out of your little head and do not cause me unnecessary suffering. Where, my delicate little bird, as yet unfledged, where will you find the means to sustain yourself, to keep yourself from perdition, to defend yourself against villains? Enough, Varenka, you must come to

your senses; don't listen to foolish counsel, don't listen to the wicked things they say about us – read your book again, read it carefully: you will derive benefit from that.

I spoke of *The Stationmaster* to Ratazyayev. He told me that was all old hat, and said that the vogue now was for books with illustrations and various kinds of description;* actually, I did not really quite grasp what he was talking about. He ended by saying that Pushkin was good and that he brought fame to Holy Russia, and told me a lot of other things about him. Yes, it's very good, Varenka, very good; read your book once again carefully, follow the advice I have given you and make me happy by your obedience, old man that I am. Then the Lord Himself will reward you, my dear, He will not fail to reward you.

Your sincere friend,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

July 6

Makar Alekseyevich, Sir,

Today Fedora brought me fifteen silver rubles. How pleased she was, poor woman, when I let her have three! I write to you in haste. I am making you a waistcoat – it's a gorgeous material, yellow with flowers. I am sending you a book: it contains all sorts of stories; I've read one or two of them; read the one called *The Overcoat*. * You are trying to persuade me to go to the theatre with you; won't that be rather expensive? Perhaps we could get seats in the gallery. It is a very long time since I went to the theatre, in fact I can't actually remember when it last was. The only thing that makes me hesitate is again the question of whether it won't be too expensive. Fedora merely shakes her head. She says you have started to live far beyond your means; indeed I can see that for myself, in all the money you have spent on me! My friend, be careful you do not get into trouble. Fedora has hinted to me that there are certain rumours – that you have had a quarrel with your landlady about the non-payment of rent; I am very concerned for you. Well, goodbye; I must hurry. I have a little business to attend to, I'm changing the ribbon on my hat.

V. D.

PS You know, if we do go to the theatre I shall wear my new hat and my black mantilla. How will that be?

July 7

Varvara Alekseyevna, Madam,

... So I was telling you about my past. Yes, little mother, at one time in my life even I had my follies. I fell head over heels in love with her, but that in itself would have been nothing remarkable; what was really extraordinary was that I had practically never seen her, and had been to the theatre only once, yet for all that I fell for her hopelessly. At that time I was living through the wall from five excitable young fellows. I associated with them, and indeed could not help doing so, though I always kept within respectable limits. Well, so as not to be thought a slowcoach, I went along with them in everything. They started telling me a lot of things about this young actress! Every evening, as soon as the theatre opened, the whole company of them – they never had half a copeck between them for essentials – the whole company would set off for the theatre, where they would sit in the gallery and clap and clap and call and call for this actress – they were like men possessed! Afterwards I would not be able to get a wink of sleep; all night long they would talk about her, each one of them calling her his Glasha, each one of them in love with her, each one of them with the same lovebird in his heart. They got me excited, too, defenceless as I was; I was then just a young stripling of a lad. I myself do not know how I managed to end up at the theatre with them, in the fourth tier of the gallery. All I could see was one little corner of the curtain, but I could hear everything. The little actress really did have a pretty voice – it was resonant, honey-sweet, like a nightingale's! We all clapped like mad, shouting and shouting – we nearly got into trouble, and one of us was actually thrown out. I arrived home as though I were drunk! I had only a single ruble left in my pocket, and there were a good ten days to go before I would receive my salary. Yet what do you think I did, little mother? The following morning, before I went to the office, I called in at a French perfumer's and spent all I had left on a bottle of some scent or other and some fragrant soap – I still do not know why I did it. I did not take my dinner at home, either, but kept walking up and down under her window. She lived on the Nevsky Prospekt, in a fourth-floor apartment. I went home, took an hour or two's rest there and went back to the Nevsky again to do some more walking up and down under her window. I did that every day for the next month and a half – paid court to her; I was forever hiring smart cabs and trying to make myself noticed as I drove past her window; I bankrupted myself completely, sank into debt, and then finally got over her: I was sick of it! That is the state to which a young actress can reduce a decent man, little mother! But I was a young stripling of a lad in those days, a young stripling of a lad!...

M. D.

8 July

Varvara Alekseyevna, my dear Madam,

I hasten to return your book, which I received on the 6th of this month, and at the same time to write to you in order to have the matter out with you. It is not good, little mother, not good that you should place me in such an extremity. If I may make so bold, little mother: every station that falls to a man is lot in this world is ordained by the Almighty. This man is ordained to wear a general's epaulettes, while that one is ordained to work in the service as a titular councillor; this man's to give the orders, and that man is to obey them in fear and trembling, without so much as a murmur. Everything is calculated according to a man's aptitude; one man has an aptitude for one thing, and another has an aptitude for something else, but those aptitudes themselves are arranged by God. I have worked for nearly thirty years now in the service; my work has been above reproach, my behaviour has been sober, and no disorderly conduct has ever been ascribed to me. As a citizen I consider myself, by my own admission, to possess certain defects, but also some virtues. I am respected by the administration, and even His Excellency himself is satisfied with my performance; even though he has not so far shown me any particular signs of favour, I know that he is satisfied. I have lived to see my hair turn grey – I am unaware of having committed any greater sin than that. Of course, who is not guilty of minor sins? Everyone is sinful – even you, little mother! But no major misdemeanours or insolent actions have ever been ascribed to me, such as doing anything against the regulations or causing a breach of public order, nothing like that has ever been laid at my door, there has been none of that: I even got a medal – but what is the good of telling you? You ought in all conscience to have known that, little mother, and so ought he; if you were going to write about me you ought to have known all the facts. No, I did not expect this of you, little mother; no, Varenka! From you in particular I did not expect it.

Here's a fine to-do! After this I can't live quietly in my own little corner any more, even though it is not up to much; now I can't go on living 'without muddying the water', as the proverb has it, not troubling anyone, knowing only myself and the fear of God and not having other people troubling me, forcing their way into my hideaway and spying on me to see what my private life is like, whether I have a good waistcoat or not, or whether I have all that I ought to have in the way of underwear; whether I have boots, and what they are lined with; what I eat, what I drink, what I am copying... So what if I do sometimes walk on tiptoe in order to save my boots where the pavement's bad, little mother? Why write about someone that he sometimes has no money, that he can't even afford tea? As though everyone were under some kind of obligation to drink tea! Do I look into other people's mouths to see what they're eating? Whom have I ever insulted in that way? No, little mother, why should I offend others when they are not troubling me? Look, here is another example, Varvara Alekseyevna, this is what it boils down to: I work and work, ardently, assiduously – how else? – and the administration respects me (whatever else it may be thinking, it does respect one) – and then along comes someone who, right under one's very nose, without any provocation and for no reason in particular, writes a lampoon about me. Of course, it's true that sometimes I do manage to get some new clothes, and then I'm delighted, I lie awake at night, overjoyed, as when I get a new pair of boots, for instance: I put them on with such voluptuous pleasure – I've found that to be true, it's because it's so good to see my leg covered by a slender, elegant boot – that's correctly described! But I'm none the less truly surprised that Fyodor Fyodorovich should have let a book of this kind pass without sticking up for himself. It's true that he is only a young bigwig, and likes to raise his voice at times; and why shouldn't he? Why shouldn't he give us a good telling-off if we need it? Suppose he does it to keep up the general tone of the place-well, that's all right; we need to be kept on our toes, to be given a warning, because – and this is just between the two of us, Varenka – none of us will do anything without being given a warning, each one of us merely seeks to figure on this or that official list so he can say 'I'm there, and I'm there', just so long as he can keep to one side and avoid doing any work. And since there are various different ranks and each rank requires a completely different kind of telling-off, it is natural that the tone of the telling-off varies in rank, too – that's in the order of things! I mean, it's what holds the world together, little mother: that we all set the tone for one another, that each of us tells the other off. Without that precaution

the world would fall apart and there would be no order anywhere. I am truly astonished that Fyodor Fyodorovich should have let such an insult pass unnoticed!

And what is the point of writing things like that? What use do they serve? Will a person who reads that story make me an overcoat, do you suppose? Do you suppose that he will buy me a new pair of boots? No, Varenka, that person will simply read the story and then demand a sequel to it. I sometimes hide myself away, I hide myself away in order to conceal the things I have failed in, I'm sometimes afraid to show my face anywhere, because I tremble at the thought of what wicked tongues may be saying about me, because people can concoct a lampoon about one out of anything at all, anything, and then one's entire public and private life is held up for inspection in the form of literature, it is all published, read, ridiculed and gossiped about! Why, in this instance it will be impossible for me to go out in the street; in this instance everything has been described in such detail that I will now be instantly recognized by my walk alone. Well, I mean, the author might have at least made up for it a bit towards the end; for example, he could have softened the impact by putting a bit in after the part where they scatter papers over the hero's head, to the effect that for all his faults he was a decent, virtuous citizen who did not deserve to be treated thus by his companions, that he was obedient to his seniors (here he could have inserted an example of some kind), wished no one any harm, believed in God and died (if he really must have his hero die) lamented. It would, however, have been much better not to have left him to die at all, the poor man, but to make his overcoat be found, to have that general find out more about his virtues, invite him into his office, raise him in rank and give him a good hike in salary, so that then, you see, vice would have been punished and virtue would have triumphed, and all those fellow-clerks would have been left empty-handed. That's how I, for one, would have written it; but the way it is, what is so special about it, what is good about it? It is just a trivial example of vile, everyday life. And why did you decide to send me a book like that, my dear? I mean, it's an ill-intentioned book, Varenka; it's simply not true to life, because a clerk of that kind could never exist. After reading such a book one feels like filing a complaint, Varenka, one feels like filing a formal complaint.

Your most obedient servant,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

July 27

Makar Alekseyevich, Sir,

Your latest actions and letters have frightened, shocked and amazed me; however, the things Fedora has told me have explained everything. But why did you despair in this fashion and fall into the abyss into which you have fallen, Makar Alekseyevich? Your explanations have not satisfied me one little bit. Consider: was I not right when I insisted on accepting the advantageous post I was offered? What is more, my most recent adventure has frightened me in earnest. You say your love for me has compelled you to keep yourself in hiding from me. I was already able to see that I was greatly indebted to you when you kept assuring me that you were only spending your savings on me, savings you told me you had put by just in case. But now that I have discovered you had no such savings at all, that having found out about my straitened circumstances and having been touched by them you decided to spend your salary, which you had drawn in advance, and had even sold your clothes when I was ill – now, faced with the revelation of all this, I find myself in such an agonizingly difficult position that I still do not know how to construe all this, or what to think of it. Oh, Makar Alekseyevich! You should have rested content with the first of your good deeds towards me, which were prompted by compassion and familial affection, and not have squandered money on unnecessary things. You have betrayed our friendship, Makar Alekseyevich, because you have not been frank with me, and now, when I see that you spent the very last money you had on smart clothes, on sweets, on walks, on the theatre and on books – now I am paying dearly with remorse for my unforgivable frivolity (for I accepted all those things from you without troubling myself about you); and everything by means of which you wanted to give me enjoyment has now turned into bitterness for me, and has left in

me nothing but a futile remorse. I have observed your despondency of late, and although I myself had a depressing sense that something was afoot, I never dreamed of this. How can it be? How could you let yourself sink to this depth of despondency, Makar Alekseyevich? What will people think of you, what will people say about you now, all those who know you? You, whom I and everyone else respected for your kindheartedness, your modesty and wisdom – you have fallen prey to a repulsive vice which no one has ever noticed in you before. What do you think I felt when Fedora told me you had been found drunk in the street and had been taken back to your lodgings by the police? I was paralysed with amazement, even though I had been expecting something untoward, as you had been missing for four days. Have you thought, Makar Alekseyevich, of what your superiors will say when they discover the true reason for your absence? You say that everyone is laughing at you; that everyone has found out about our friendship and that your neighbours are making sarcastic remarks about me. Please do not pay any attention to this, Makar Alekseyevich, and, for the love of God, take a hold of yourself. I am also frightened by this encounter you had with those officers; I have heard vague rumours about it. Please will you explain to me what that is all about? You say in your letter that you were afraid to be open with me, that you were afraid that if you told me about it you would lose my friendship, that you were in despair about what to do in order to help me in my illness, that you sold everything in order to support me and keep me from going into hospital, that you got yourself into debt to the very limit of your credit, and that every day you have unpleasant scenes with your landlady – but I must tell you that, in doing so, you have chosen the wrong course of action. Now, however, I have learned all. You were too ashamed to make me realize that I was the cause of your unhappy position, yet now, by your behaviour, you have succeeded in bringing me twice as much woe. All this has shocked me, Makar Alekseyevich. Oh, my friend! Unhappiness is an infectious disease. Poor and unhappy people ought to steer clear of one another, so as not to catch a greater degree of infection. I have brought you unhappiness such as you never experienced earlier in the modest and isolated existence you have led. All this is tormenting me and making me waste away with grief.

Please write me a frank account of what happened to you and how you could have come to behave like that. If you can, please set my mind at rest. It is not self-regard that compels me to write to you now about my peace of mind, but my friendship and love for you, which nothing will ever efface from my heart. Goodbye. I await your reply with impatience. You do not properly know me, Makar Alekseyevich.

Your truly loving,

VARVARA DOBROSELOVA

July 28

My precious Varvara Alekseyevna,

Well, since all that is now over and things are gradually returning to how they were before, I will tell you this, little mother: you are worried about what people will think of me, but I hasten to assure you, Varvara Alekseyevna, that my self-esteem is what matters to me before all else. As a consequence of which, and with reference to my misfortunes and all these disorderly events, I beg to inform you that none of my superiors know anything about them, nor are likely to do so, and will therefore all continue to treat me with respect, as before. I am afraid of only one thing: loose tongues. The landlady in our house over here has been shouting her head off, but now that with the help of your ten rubles I have paid off part of my debt to her she merely grumbles, and that is all. As for the others, they turn a blind eye; as long as one doesn't try to borrow money from them, they don't care. And to conclude my explanations I shall tell you, little mother, that I value your respect for me more highly than anything else in the world and am consoled by it now in my temporary state of confusion. Thank God that the first impact and the worst of the trouble is now over, and that you have construed it in such a way as not to consider me a false friend and a selfish brute for keeping you here and deceiving you, not having the strength to part with you, and loving you as my little angel. I have set zealously to work now and have begun to discharge my duties well. Yevstafy Ivanovich did not say a word when I walked past him yesterday. I will not conceal

from you, little mother, that my debts and the shabby condition of my wardrobe are causing me considerable pain, but that is nothing to worry about, either, and I beseech you not to despair in that regard, little mother. If you will send me another fifty copecks, Varenka, then those fifty copecks too, will pierce my heart. So this is what it has come to now, this is what it has come to! It is not I, old fool that I am, who am helping you, but you, my poor little orphan, who are helping me! Fedora did well to get the money. For the moment I have no hope of getting any, little mother, but as soon as there is hope of my doing so I will write and tell you all about it. But it is loose tongues, loose tongues that worry me most of all. Goodbye, my little angel. I kiss your hand and implore you to get well again. I do not write in more detail because I am in a hurry to get to work, since I wish by dint of zeal and effort to make amends for my dereliction of duty; I shall put off a further account of all that happened to me and of my adventure with the officers until the evening.

Your respectful and truly loving

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

July 28

Oh, Varenka, Varenka! Now it is you who are the guilty one. Your letter completely flabbergasted me and put me off my balance, and it is only now, when in my spare time I have managed to search the innermost corners of my heart, that I realize I was right, absolutely right. I speak not of my drunken binge (bother it, little mother, bother it!), but of the fact that I love you and that it was not at all unreasonable of me to fall in love with you, not unreasonable of me at all. You don't know anything about it, little mother; yet if only you knew why it happened, why I could do no other but to fall in love with you, you would not say those things. That is only your reason talking; I am certain that your heart says something else entirely.

My little mother, I myself do not know and cannot properly remember what took place between those officers and me. I must tell you, my little angel, that in the time leading up to that event I had been in the most terrible state of distress. You must bear in mind that for the whole of the previous month I had been, so to say, hanging by the merest thread. My situation was a thoroughly wretched one. I had been keeping myself to myself, seeing neither you nor the other people in the house; but my landlady kept raising a terrible hullabaloo. In other circumstances that might not have mattered to me. Let the miserable woman shout as much as she wanted to – but in the first place there was the shame of it, and in the second there was the fact that, God knows how, she had learned of our friendship and kept shouting such things about it to the whole house that I was frozen with horror and stopped up my ears. The trouble was, however, that the others did not stop up theirs, but, on the contrary, strained them in order to hear. Even now, little mother, I don't know where to hide myself...

And then, my little angel, all this devil's brew of every kind of affliction completely overwhelmed me. I suddenly started to hear strange things from Fedora: that an unworthy suitor had appeared on your doorstep and had insulted you by making an unworthy proposal; that he had indeed insulted you, deeply insulted you, I judged by my own reactions, little mother, because I *myself* felt deeply insulted. At that point, my little angel, I lost my wits entirely: I went into a panic and completely lost control. Varenka, my friend, I ran out in an impossible rage; I wanted to go and confront him, the blackguard; I didn't know what I wanted to do – so great was my determination that no one should insult you, my little angel! Yes, I was in a sorry state. It was raining, there was sleet, it was a horribly depressing day... I was almost on the point of turning back... Then, little mother, came my fall. I met Yemelya,* that's Yemelyan Ilyich – he's a clerk, or rather he was, he's not one any more, because he's been dismissed from our department. I don't even know what he does now, he toils away at something or another there; well, I went with him. Then – but Varenka, I cannot really think that you will derive much enjoyment from hearing about your friend's misfortunes, about the calamities that have befallen him and the ordeals he has endured. On the evening of the third day, Yemelya egged me on, and I went to see that officer who had insulted you. I found out his address from our yardkeeper. If you want to know the truth, little mother, I have

long been aware of that fine fellow; I used to keep an eye on him when he was lodging in our house. I can see now that I committed an improper act, as I was not my right self when I was announced to him. Quite honestly, Varenka, I can't remember any of it; all I remember is that there were an awful lot of officers in his place, or perhaps I was seeing double – God knows. I can't remember what I said, either. All I remember is that in my righteous indignation I said a great many things. Well, then they turfed me out and threw me down the stairs – actually, they didn't quite do that, but just shoved me out. You already know how I got home, Varenka; that's all there is to tell. Of course, I brought myself discredit and my pride took a knock, but after all, no one else apart from yourself knows anything about it; and if that is so, then it's just the same as if the whole thing had never happened. Perhaps it is – what do you think, Varenka? The only thing I know for certain is that in our house last year Aksenty Osipovich made a similar attack on the personal honour of Pyotr Petrovich, only in secret, he did it in secret. He made him go into the nightwatchman's room with him, I saw it all through a crack in the door; and there he did what was necessary to settle the matter, but in a decent manner, as no one saw what took place except myself; well, and it didn't bother me, or rather, that is, I didn't tell anyone about it. Well, after that Pyotr Petrovich and Aksenty Osipovich stopped getting at each other. Pyotr Petrovich is a proud man, you know, so he didn't tell anyone, and even now they still bow to each other and shake hands with each other. I will not contest, Varenka, to you I would not dare to contest that I have sunk very low and, what is even more terrible, have lost in terms of my own self-regard; but this was doubtless written in my stars from birth, this must be my fate – and there is no escaping fate, as well you know. Well, that is a full account of my misfortunes and calamities, Varenka, that is everything that happened at that time, even if you do not care to read it. I am somewhat unwell, my little mother, and have lost all playfulness of feeling. And so now, testifying to my devotion, love and respect for you, I remain, my dear madam, Varvara Alekseyevna,

Your most obedient servant,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

July 29

Makar Alekseyevich, My Dear Sir!

I have read both your letters, and how they made me sigh! Listen, my friend: you are either hiding something from me and only telling me a part of all your unpleasant experiences, or... to be honest, Makar Alekseyevich, your letters still show the signs of a certain confusion... for goodness' sake come and see me, come and see me today; and listen, come and have dinner with us, you know you are welcome. I do not know how you are, and whether you have patched things up with your landlady. You write nothing about all that, as if you were hiding something on purpose. So until we meet, my friend; you must promise to come and see us today; and you would do best to come and eat with us every day. Fedora is a very good cook. Goodbye.

Your

VARVARA DOBROSELOVA

August 1

Varvara Alekseyevna, Dear Mother!

You are glad, little mother, that God has sent you an opportunity of doing one good deed in exchange for another, and of showing your gratitude. I have faith in that, Varenka, I have faith in the goodness of your angel's heart, and I say this not as a rebuke – but please do not reproach me, as you have done, for squandering my money in my old age. Yes, if you really must insist that I have sinned, then what is there to be done about it? I have sinned; only it costs me much to

hear such things from you, my little friend. You must not be angry with me for saying this; in my breast there is nothing but pain and hurt, little mother. Poor folk are capricious – that is the way nature makes them. This is not the first time I have felt it. The poor man is a severe critic; he looks at God's world from a different angle, he furtively sizes up each person he meets, looks about him with a troubled gaze, and listens carefully to every word he overhears – are people talking about him? Are they saying he is not much to look at, wondering about what he is feeling, what he is like from this point of view and that point of view? And Varenka, everyone knows that a poor man is worth less than an old rag, and cannot hope for respect from anyone, whatever they may write, those scribblers, whatever they may write! The poor man will remain the same as he has always been. And why will he remain the same? Because, according to their lights, the poor man must be turned inside out; he must have no privacy, no dignity of any kind! Yemelya told me the other day that some people somewhere organized a whip-round for him, and that a sort of official check was made of every copeck that was paid to him. They thought they were giving him their money out of charity – but they weren't: they were paying for having a poor man exhibited to them. Even charity is conducted in a peculiar way nowadays, little mother... but perhaps it has always been like that – who knows! Either they don't know how to do it, or they're past masters at it – one or the other. Perhaps you didn't know that; well, there you are! In any other field of knowledge you can count us out, but here we're experts! And how does it come to be that a poor man knows all this and thinks all these things? Why, because he has experience! Because, for example, he knows that there is at his side a gentleman who is going to a restaurant, saying to himself: 'What is that ragged clerk going to eat today? I'm going to have *sauté papillotte*, while he is probably going to have kasha with no butter. But what business is it of his, what I'm going to eat? There is a type of man, Varenka, who thinks only about things like that. And they go about, the shameless lampoonists, looking to see whether you put the whole of your foot down on the pavement or just the tips of your toes; look, they say, such-and-such a clerk from such-and-such a department, a titular councillor, is going around with his bare toes sticking out of his boots, and the elbows of his jacket worn through – and then they go home and write about it all and then have this rubbish printed... But what business is it of his that my elbows are worn through? Indeed, if you will forgive me a coarse expression, Varenka, I will even go so far as to say that on this account the poor man has a modesty that is equivalent to your own maidenly reticence. I mean, you wouldn't – please forgive my vulgarity – unveil yourself in front of everyone, would you? In precisely the same way the poor man doesn't like people to look into his hideaway to see what his private life is like. And so there was no need to insult me, Varenka, taking sides with my enemies who assail the honour and personal dignity of an honest man.

And as I sat in the office today I felt such an ungainly fool, such a bedraggled old idiot that I nearly burned up with shame. I was so ashamed of myself, Varenka! After all, it's not surprising one feels ashamed when one's bare elbows are peeping through one's sleeves and the buttons on one's jacket are hanging by threads. And as luck would have it, my desk was in the most terrible mess! In spite of myself, my spirits sank. What can I say?... Stepan Karlovich himself began discussing my work with me today; he talked and talked, and then added, almost casually: 'Oh, Makar Alekseyevich, old chap!' – and didn't finish the rest of what he'd intended to say. But I guessed what it was, and I blushed so violently that even my bald patch turned red. It was really an insignificant event, yet it nevertheless made me feel anxious and prompted me to gloomy thoughts. What if the others overheard? O God forbid that they should have overheard anything! I must confess that I suspect, strongly suspect a certain little fellow. I mean, it is nothing to them, those villains! They will inform on me! They will give away all the details of a man's private life for a brass copeck; they hold nothing sacred.

I now know whose doing this is. It is Ratazyayev's doing. Yes, he must know someone in our department who overheard the conversation and who repeated it all to him with bits added on; or perhaps he told the story to the people in his own department and it found its way to ours. Whatever the truth may be, everyone in our lodging-house knows the whole story right down to the last detail, and they point to your window; I know that they do this. When I went to have dinner with you yesterday, they all put their heads out of their windows; the landlady said that the devil had taken up with the infant, and then she called you an indecent name. But all that was nothing compared to Ratazyayev is villainous

intention of putting you and myself into literature and describing us in an elegant satire; he told me of this himself, and some of the more kindly disposed of our lodgers have also informed me of it. I no longer know what to think about anything, and I do not know what to do. There is no use in trying to conceal our sin, we have incurred God's anger, my little angel! You said you would send me a book, little mother, to keep me from being bored. Fie upon it, the book, little mother! What is a book? It is just a fable with faces! Novels are rubbish, too, written as rubbish, merely for idle people to read: believe me, little mother, trust my experience of many years. And if they come telling you about some Shakespeare or other, saying 'Look, there is Shakespeare – he is literature' – then be aware that Shakespeare is rubbish, too, it's all the purest rubbish, and all made simply for the purpose of lampoonery!

Your

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

August 2

Makar Alekseyevich, Sir,

Don't worry about a thing; with God's help it will all be settled. Fedora has managed to get a whole pile of work for the two of us to do, and we have made a start on it in a thoroughly cheerful frame of mind; perhaps we shall set everything to rights. Fedora has a suspicion that Anna Fyodorovna may know a thing or two about my recent unpleasant experience; but now it's all the same to me. For some reason I feel unusually cheerful today. You want to borrow money – God forbid! You will have terrible trouble later on when you have to pay it back. You would do better to live on closer terms with us – come and see us more often and don't pay so much attention to your landlady. As for your other enemies and ill-wishers, I am sure you are tormenting yourself with needless doubts, Makar Alekseyevich! Take care; after all, I did tell you last time that your way of putting things is extremely irregular. Well, goodbye, until we meet. I expect to see you without fail.

Your

V. D.

August 3

varvara Alekseyevna, my little angel!

I hasten to inform you, little light of my life, that I have begun to entertain hopes of a certain nature. But, daughter mine – you write, my little angel, that I am not to take any loans? My little dove, I cannot manage without them; after all, I am unwell, and what if things were suddenly to go wrong for you, as for all I know they might? I mean, you are not exactly strong; so that is why I wrote that I must absolutely borrow some money. Well, then, I shall continue.

Varvara Alekseyevna, I wish to draw your attention to the fact that in the office I sit next to Yemelyan Ivanovich. he is not the Yemelyan of whom you already know. This one is a titular councillor, like myself, and he and I are practically the oldest and longest-established employees in the whole of our department. he is a good soul, an altruistic soul; he doesn't say much, and always gives everyone a surly look. But he is businesslike, and he writes a good English round hand; if you want to know the truth, he writes as well as I do – he's a worthy fellow! He and I have never been on intimate terms, we're merely in the custom of saying hullo and goodbye to each other; and if I occasionally need to use the penknife I ask him for it – 'Pass me the penknife, please, Yemelyan Ivanovich,' I'll say. In short, our relationship has been limited to the demands of our working together in the same office. Well, today he said to me: 'Makar Alekseyevich, why have you grown so pensive of late?' I could see that the man wished me no harm, and I told him what was on my mind. 'It is like this and it is like that, Yemelyan Ivanovich,' I said; in other words I didn't tell him everything – God

forbid, I shall never tell it all, as I have not the courage – but merely told him a bit about how I was feeling the pinch and that kind of thing. ‘You know what you ought to do, old chap?’ Yemelyan Ivanovich said. ‘You ought to borrow; why don’t you borrow from Pyotr Petrovich, he lends money at interest; I’ve borrowed from him myself in the past, he charges a reasonable rate – it won’t overburden you.’ Well, Varenka, my heart leapt. I thought and thought, it is just possible that the Lord will touch the soul of that beneficent man Pyotr Petrovich, and he will grant me a loan. I was already working out in my head how then I would be able to pay the landlady, help you, and sort out my affairs all round; otherwise I would be in such a shameful position: just sitting at my desk makes me feel terrible, never mind the jeering laughter of those scoffers of ours, the devil take them. And then, sometimes His Excellency passes my desk; well, God forbid that he should cast a glance at me and notice that I’m not properly dressed. The things that count for most with him are cleanliness and tidiness. He might not say anything, but I would die of shame – that is how it would be. So, in consequence, I summoned up my courage and, concealing my sense of shame in my pocket full of holes, I went off to see Pyotr Petrovich, full of hope and yet more dead than alive with apprehension – both at the same time. But why, Varenka, it all ended in nonsense! He was busy with something, and was talking to Fedosei Ivanovich. I approached him from the side and tugged his sleeve: ‘Pyotr Petrovich,’ I said, ‘Pyotr Petrovich!’ He looked round, and I continued, telling him this and that, how I needed thirty rubles, and so on. At first he did not understand me, and then, when I had explained it all to him, he merely laughed and said nothing. I repeated my request. Then he said to me: ‘Have you any security?’ And he buried his nose in the document he was busy with, went on writing and did not give me a further glance. I was dumbfounded. ‘No, Pyotr Petrovich,’ I said, ‘I’ve no deposit.’ I explained to him that as soon as I received my salary I would consider it my first duty to pay the money back. At that point someone called him; I waited for him, he returned and then began to sharpen his pen, apparently oblivious of me. I continued to press my case: ‘Pyotr Petrovich,’ I said, ‘can’t something be managed somehow?’ He said nothing and seemed not to hear; I stood there and stood there. ‘Well,’ I thought, ‘I’ll try just one last time,’ and I tugged him by the sleeve. He said something I could not make out, finished sharpening his pen, and began to write; I gave up, and walked away. You see, little mother, they may be worthy men, but they’re proud, very proud – but what is that to me? Why should we trouble ourselves with them, Varenka? That is why I have written you all this. Yemelyan Ivanovich also laughed and shook his head, but he gave me hope, the kind fellow – Yemelyan Ivanovich is a worthy man. He promised to introduce me to a certain man; this man, Varenka, lives on the Vyborg Side, and also lends money at interest; he is some kind of fourteenth-class civil servant.* Yemelyan Ivanovich says this man will be sure to lend me the money; I shall go and see him tomorrow, my little angel – eh? What do you think? I mean, I’ll be in trouble if I don’t get a loan. My landlady is almost on the point of evicting me, and she won’t give me any more meals. And my boots are in a shocking state, little mother, and I’ve no buttons on my jacket... I’ve nothing much of anything else, either! Well, what if someone from the administration notices an improper state of affairs like that? I’ll be in trouble, Varenka, terrible trouble!

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

August 4

Dear Makar Alekseyevich,

Please, for the love of God, try to borrow some money as soon as you possibly can; I would do anything rather than ask you for help in your present circumstances, but if you only knew the position in which I find myself! It is out of the question for us to remain in this apartment. A most horribly unpleasant thing has happened to me, and you have no idea how upset and agitated I am! Imagine, my friend: this morning we received a visit from a stranger, advanced in years, an old man, practically, wearing medal-ribbons. I was totally bewildered, and could not think what he wanted with us. Fedora had gone out shopping at the time. This man started to ask me questions: how was I, what was I doing, and, without waiting for a reply, he informed me that he was the uncle of that officer, and that he was very angry with his nephew for his bad behaviour and for having spread our name all over the house; he said that his nephew was a puerile,

superficial fellow, and that he himself wished to offer me his protection; he advised me not to listen to young men, and added that he sympathized with me as a father, that he had fatherly feelings for me and wanted to help me in any way he could. I turned quite red, not knowing what to think, but was in no hurry to accept his offer. He took hold of my hand by force, patted me on the cheek, said that I was very pretty and that he was particularly pleased to note I had dimples (God knows what things he said!), and finally tried to kiss me, saying that he was just a harmless old man (what a vile character he was!). At that point Fedora came in. Put off his mark by this slightly, he once again said that he felt respect for me because of my modesty and my correct behaviour, and that he very much hoped I would not be put off by him. Then he took Fedora aside and tried to give her a certain sum of money on some strange pretext. Fedora naturally refused to take it. At last he got ready to leave, repeated his assurances, and said he would come and see me again and bring me earrings (I think he was very embarrassed); he advised me to move to another apartment and told me about a very nice one he knew of which he could get me for nothing; he said he had taken a real liking to me as I was an honest, sensible girl, counselled me to be on my guard against dissipated young men, ended by informing me that he knew Anna Fyodorovna and that Anna Fyodorovna had instructed him to tell me that she was going to pay me a visit. At that point it all became clear to me. I don't know what happened to me; it was the first time in my life that I had ever experienced such a situation; I was beside myself with rage; I put him utterly to shame. Fedora helped me, and together we more or less kicked him out of the apartment. We decided it must all have been Anna Fyodorovna is doing: otherwise how could he have known about us?

So now I turn to you, Makar Alekseyevich, and beseech you for help. For the love of God, do not leave me in a situation like this! Please try to borrow at least something, we don't have enough money to change apartments, and it's impossible for us to remain here any longer: that is what Fedora says, too. We need at least twenty-five rubles; I'll pay you the money back; I shall earn it. Fedora will get me some more work in a few days' time, so don't be put off if they demand a high rate of interest – agree to anything. I'll pay it all back, only for the love of God don't withhold your help. It distresses me greatly to have to trouble you now, when you are in such dire straits yourself, but you are the only hope I have! Goodbye, Makar Alekseyevich, think of me, and may God grant you success!

V. D.

August 4

Varvara Alekseyevna, my little dove!

All these unexpected blows are dumbfounding me! Such terrible disasters are breaking my spirit! What is more, this devil is brood of lickspittles and worthless old greybeards is trying to bring you to your sickbed, my little angel – not only that, these very same lickspittles are trying to wear me out. And they will succeed, I swear it, they will succeed! You know, I would sooner die than fail to bring you the help you need! If I fail to help you, Varenka, that will be the end of me, pure and simple; yet if I do help you, you will fly away from me, like a bird from the nest which these owls, these birds of prey, have been trying to peck to death. That is what is tormenting me, little mother. Oh, Varenka, you are cruel, too! Why are you like that? You are subjected to torture and insult, my little bird, you suffer, and what is more you grieve because you have to trouble me, and then you promise to work off the debt – which really means that in your frail state of health you will kill yourself in order to get me the money on time. I mean, Varenka, just think what you are saying! Why should you have to sew, why should you have to work, tormenting your poor little head, ruining your pretty little eyes and destroying your heakh? Oh, Varenka, Varenka! Look, my little dove, I am fit for nothing – I know I am fit for nothing, but I shall do things in such a way as to make myself fit for something! I shall overcome all difficulties. I'll get work on the side, I'll copy things for literary men, I'll go to them, I'll go to them myself and force them to give me work; because they're looking for good copyists, I know that they are, and I won't let you wear yourself out; I won't allow you to carry out such a ruinous intention. I shall surely borrow the money, my little angel, I'd rather die than not borrow

it. And you write, my dove, that I shouldn't be frightened off by a high rate of interest –well, I won't, little mother, I won't be frightened off, nothing can frighten me now. I'll ask for forty paper rubles, little mother; that is not too much, is it, Varenka – what do you think? Do you think I can get forty rubles' worth of credit first time off? In other words, what I mean is, do you think I'm capable of inspiring trust and confidence at first sight? Do you think it is possible that they'll judge me favourably at the first sight of my physiognomy? You remember me, my little angel, do you think I'm capable of inspiring confidence? What is your own personal opinion? You know I feel so terribly afraid – it's unhealthy, really unhealthy! Out of the forty rubles I shall set aside twenty for you, Varenka; the landlady will get two silver rubles, and the rest will be earmarked for my own personal expenditure. Now you see, I ought to give the landlady a bit more, it is even necessary, but you figure it out for yourself, little mother, take into account all my needs and you will see that it is impossible for me to give her more, so consequently there is no point in even talking about it, and we might as well forget about it. I shall spend one silver ruble on a pair of boots; I don't really think I can go to the office tomorrow wearing my old ones. A new tie would also be a good idea, as I've had my old one for more than a year now; but since you have promised to make me, out of your old apron, not only a tie but also a shirtfront, I shan't give any more thought to a new tie. So there, I have boots and a tie. Now we come to the subject of buttons, my little friend! After all, my little one, I think you will agree that one cannot do without buttons; and almost half of mine have fallen off! I tremble when I think that His Excellency may notice this disorderly state of affairs and say – oh, what would he say? At any rate, little mother, I wouldn't hear what he said; for I'd die, I'd die, I'd die on the spot, I should simply die of shame, from the very thought! Oh, little mother! Well, after all those necessities I'll have three rubles left; that will go on living expenses and half a pound of tobacco; because, my little angel, I can't live without tobacco, and it's nine days now since I had a pipeful. I would, to tell you the truth, buy it and say nothing about it to you, but I'd feel guilty. There you are in misery, you're doing without the most essential things, and here I am enjoying all sorts of gratification; so that is why I'm telling you all this, so as not to suffer the torments of my conscience. I will frankly confess to you, Varenka, that I am now in a thoroughly disastrous situation – indeed, nothing remotely similar to this has ever happened to me before. The landlady treats me with contempt, and I get no respect from anyone; I'm terribly short of money, I have debts; and as for my life at the office, where even previously my fellow clerks weren't exactly in the habit of putting out the red carpet for me – well, little mother, now it doesn't bear speaking about. I hide my feelings, I scrupulously hide my feelings from them all, and I hide myself, and when I come into the office I do it stealthily, and I keep away from everyone else. I mean, you're the only person with whom I can summon up the strength of mind to confess it... And what if he won't lend me the money? No, Varenka, it is better not to think about that and not have one's spirit broken in advance by such ideas. Another reason I am writing to you is to warn you not to think about that and not to torment yourself with evil imaginings. Oh, my God, what will become of you then? It is true, however, that you won't be able to move out of that apartment, and I'll be with you – but no, I wouldn't come back. I'd just disappear somewhere, go missing. Here I am covering sheets with writing to you, and I ought to be getting shaved; it looks better, and looks are important. Well, may God be with us! I shall say a prayer, and then be off.

M. DEVUSHKIN

August 5

Dearest Makar Alekseyevich!

Please don't give in to despair! There is enough trouble already as it is. I am sending you thirty copecks in silver; more than that I cannot manage. Buy yourself the things you need most, so that at least you can survive until tomorrow. We ourselves have practically nothing left, and I do not know what will happen tomorrow. It is so sad, Makar Alekseyevich! But don't *you* be sad; if you haven't succeeded, there is nothing to be done about it. Fedora says that it is not a complete disaster, that we can stay on in this apartment for a while yet, that even if we moved we wouldn't gain that much by it, and that if they really put their minds to it they can find us wherever we are. It is just that I don't feel

very good about staying on here now. If I didn't feel so sad I would write to you about a few things.

What a strange character you are, Makar Alekseyevich! You take everything too much to heart; because of that, you will always be a most unhappy man. I always read your letters very closely, and I see that in each one of them you show a worry and concern about me such as you have never shown about yourself. People will, of course, say that you have a good heart, but to that I will reply that it is too good. Let me give you a piece of friendly advice, Makar Alekseyevich. I am grateful to you, very grateful for all that you have done for me, I am deeply appreciative of it; so imagine what I feel like when I see that even now, after all the calamities which have befallen you, and of which I have been the involuntary cause, you are still living exclusively through me: my joys, my griefs, my emotions! If you take someone else's experiences so much to heart and have such a strong degree of sympathy with them all, you will end up a most unhappy man. Today when you came into my room after you had returned from the office I felt afraid. You were so pale, so frightened, so despairing: you looked awful – and all because you were afraid to tell me that you had failed, afraid of upsetting me or alarming me. And when you saw that I was almost on the point of laughing, your spirits lifted at once. Makar Alekseyevich! Don't be so miserable, don't give in to despair, be more sensible – I beg you, I implore you. Look at it this way: everything will be all right, everything will work out for the best; otherwise it will be so hard for you to go on living, forever downcast and tormented by other people's suffering. Goodbye, my friend; I beg you not to worry so much about me.

V. D.

August 5

Varenka, my little dove!

Well, that is fine, my little angel, that's fine! You have decided that it is not a complete disaster, my failure to get the money. Well, that's fine, my mind is at rest, I am happy on your account. I am even glad that you are not going to abandon me, old man that I am, and that you will remain in your present apartment. In fact, to tell you the truth, my heart overflowed with joy when I read all the nice things you said about me in your letter and saw how you rendered my feelings the praise that was due. I say this not out of pride, but because I can see how you must love me, if you are so worried about my feelings. Well, that's fine; what is there to be said about feelings, in any case? Feelings do as they will; but then, little mother, you also tell me not to be faint-hearted. Yes, my little angel, indeed, I am the first to admit that it is no good being faint-hearted; yet for all that, see for yourself, little mother, what manner of boots I must wear to the office tomorrow! There's the rub, little mother; but I mean, a thought like that can crush a man, crush him totally. But the main thing, my darling, is that it is not myself I am grieving for, not myself for whose sake I am suffering; it is all the same to me, I'll go around without an overcoat in the biting frost and manage without boots, I'll suffer it and put up with it, I don't mind; I'm an ordinary man, a little man – but what will people say? My enemies, all these evil tongues, what will they say if I go around with no overcoat on? After all, one wears an overcoat for the sake of other people, and the same is true of boots. I need boots, little mother, my darling, in order to maintain my honour and my good name; if my boots have holes in them, I can say goodbye to both the one and the other – believe me, little mother, and trust in my many years of experience; listen to me, an old man who knows the world and its inhabitants, listen to me, and not to scribblers and scrawlers.

I have not yet given you a full account, little mother, of all that happened today, and of what I have been through. I suffered more mental agony in one morning than many men endure in the course of a year. This is what happened: in the first place, I set off at the crack of dawn, in order to catch him and then be in time for the office. What rain, what sleet there was this morning! I wrapped myself up in my overcoat, my dear, I trudged on and on, thinking to myself all the while: 'Lord, forgive me my transgressions and grant the fulfilment of my desires!' As I was passing St X's Church, I made

the sign of the cross over myself, repented of all my sins and rediance that it was unworthy of me to try to do business with the Lord God. I was absorbed in myself, and had no wish to look at anything; thus I trudged on, not really noticing where I was going. The streets were deserted, and the few people I did run into looked worried and preoccupied, and no wonder: who would go out for a walk so early and in weather like that? I came upon a gang of dirty workmen; they shoved me, the peasants! I was attacked by a sense of fear, a sinking feeling came over me, to tell you the truth, I didn't want to think about the money – let chance decide! Just as I was about to cross Voskresensky Bridge the sole of one of my boots fell off, and I don't really know how I managed to walk any further. At that point I saw Yermolayev, one of the clerks in our office, coming in my direction. He came to a halt, stiffened up and followed me with his gaze, as though he were begging for money to buy vodka; 'Eh, old chap,' I thought, 'vodka? Where'll you get vodka round here?' I was horribly tired. I stopped, rested for a bit, and then plodded onwards. I searched about for something on which to fasten my thoughts, to provide myself with a diversion, to cheer myself up: but no – not one of my thoughts could find anything to adhere to, and moreover I got so muddy that I was ashamed of myself. At last in the distance I saw a yellow wooden house with an attic turret like a belvedere – 'Well,' I thought, 'that's it, that's how Yemelyan Ivanovich described it – Markov is house.' (This Markov is the man who lends money, little mother.) By that time I was in a bit of a daze; I mean, I knew it was Markov is house, but even so I asked the policeman who was on duty there: 'Whose house is this, officer?' The policeman was a rude fellow, spoke as though it was an effort to do so, as though he were angry at someone, through his teeth: 'Whose house is it?' he said. 'It's Markov is house, of course.' These policemen are all such insensitive fellows – though what do I care about policemen? But from then on everything seemed all wrong and unpleasant, just one bad thing after another; it is as though one picked up in everything only those impressions that are concordant with one is state of mind, and it is always like that. I walked up and down outside the house three times, and the longer I walked, the worse I felt. 'No,' I thought, 'he won't lend me the money, never in a million years will he lend it to me. I'm a stranger to him, my request is a ticklish one, and I don't look right. Well,' I thought, 'let fate decide; as long as I don't feel like kicking myself afterwards; he won't eat me just for trying.' And I quietly opened the gate. Then another misfortune befell me: I was set upon by a stupid, wretched watchdog; it was practically jumping out of its skin, barking as loudly as it could! Vile, trivial incidents like that that always infuriate a man, little mother, they take away his self-confidence and undermine all the determination he has summoned up beforehand; so I entered the house more dead than alive, and walked straight into yet another misfortune – unable to see in the darkness that surrounded the front entrance, I tripped and fell over some peasant woman who was straining milk from a pail into some jugs, and all the milk got spilt. The stupid woman began to shriek and chatter, saying 'Where do you think you're going, my fellow, what is it you want?' Then she started wailing something about the evil one. I include this in my account, little mother, because this kind of thing always happens to me in this kind of situation; it seems to be written in my stars; I unfailingly get bogged down in something irrelevant. Hearing the noise, an old witch of a Finnish landlady stuck her head out of the door, and I went straight up to her: 'Does Markov live here?' I said. 'No,' she said; she stood there giving me a good look over. 'What do you want with him?' I told her this and that, saying that Yemelyan Ivanovich had – well, and all the rest of it – I said I'd come on business. The old woman called her daughter – a grown girl who was barefoot – 'Go and get your father; he is upstairs with the lodgers,' she said to her. To me she said, 'Come in.' I went inside. The room wasn't too bad, there were pictures on the walls, all portraits of generals; there was a sofa, a round table, a spray of mignonette, some little pots of balsam – I had a good think, and wondered whether I oughtn't to just clear off and make no bones about it. And I mean, oh, little mother, I really wanted to take flight! 'I'd do better to come back tomorrow,' I thought; 'the weather will be better then, why don't I wait for a bit? Today the milk is been spilt, and those generals look a bit stropo to me...' I was already at the door when he came in – a grey-haired little fellow with furtive little eyes, dressed in a grease-stained dressing-gown tied at the waist with a piece of rope. He inquired the reason for my visit, and I said that Yemelyan Ivanovich had told me one thing and another, and that it was a question of forty rubles, but I couldn't get to the end of it. I could see from his eyes that my cause was a lost one. 'We can't do business,' he said, 'I've no money; do you have any security?' I started to explain that I hadn't any security, but that Yemelyan Ivanovich – in short, I explained what I

wanted. When he had heard everything, he said: 'Never mind what Yemelyan Ivanovich told you – the fact is, I've no money.' 'Well,' I thought, 'that is it, then; I knew this was how it was going to be, I could sense it.' Oh, Varenka, I wished the earth would swallow me up; I felt so cold, my legs were stiff with it, and the goosepimples ran up and down my spine. I looked at him, and he looked at me, and I could see he was more or less saying: 'All right, brother, now be off with you – there is nothing for you here.' I mean, if the same thing had happened in different circumstances, I'd have felt utterly ashamed of myself. 'What do you need the money for, anyway?' he asked. (He actually asked that, little mother!) I opened my mouth, if only to avoid standing there to no purpose like that, but he cut in before I could speak. 'No,' he said. 'I've no money; if I had, I'd have lent you some with pleasure.' Then I began to press my case, told him it was only a little money I needed, said I would pay it back on time, that he could name any percentage of interest he liked, and swore to God I would pay back the full amount. At that moment I mentioned you, little mother, I mentioned all your misfortunes and privations, I mentioned the fifty copecks you had sent me – 'No,' he said. 'What good is interest? Now if you had some security! But in any case, I've no money, I swear to God and truly I haven't; I'd have lent you some with pleasure.' He took the Lord is name in vain, too, the scoundrel!

Well, my dear, I don't really remember how I got out of that place, how I managed to cross Vyborg Street and get on to Voskresensky Bridge. I was horribly tired, was chilled to the bone and it was ten o'clock before I managed to report for work. I wanted to brush some of the mud off me, but Snegiryov the caretaker wouldn't let me: 'You'd ruin the brush, master, and it's government property,' he said. That is the way they all behave now, little mother. To these people I'm no better than a rag for them to wipe their boots on. Do you know what it is that breaks my spirit, Varenka? It is not the money, it is all these everyday worries, all these whispers, smiles, jokes. Apparently it is possible that His Excellency may concern himself with my particulars – Oh, little mother, my golden days have passed forever! Today I reread all your letters; it made me so sad, little mother! Goodbye, my darling, may the Lord preserve you!

M. DEVUSHKIN

PS My intention, Varenka, was to describe my troubles from a humorous point of view, but I evidently don't have the knack of it, humour, I mean. I shall come and see you, little mother, without fail, I shall come tomorrow.

August 11

Varvara Alekseyevna! Little mother, my dove! I am lost, we are both lost, both of us together, irretrievably lost. My reputation, my pride – all gone. It is the end of me, and the end of you, little mother, it is the irreversible end of both of us together! And it is I, I who have brought you to this! They are persecuting me, little mother, they treat me with contempt, hold me up to ridicule, and the landlady has simply begun to abuse me; she has been shouting and shouting at me today, she railed and railed at me, reduced me to the lowest of the low. And this evening in Ratazyayev's room one of them began reading out the draft of a letter I'd written you, it had somehow fallen out of my pocket. Mother of mine, what a feast of derision they had over it! They named us, they named us out loud and hooted with laughter, the traitors! I went into the room where they were and accused Ratazyayev of treachery; I told him he was a traitor. Ratazyayev replied that I myself was a traitor, that I spent my time with 'various conquests': 'You've been hiding it from us,' he said. 'You're a Lovelace.'⁴ And now they all call me 'Lovelace', and won't address me by any other name! Do you hear, my little angel, do you hear? Now they know everything, they have all the facts, they know about you, my darling, they know about all your personal matters, they know it all! Why, even Faldoni was there, and he is in cahoots with them; I sent him out to the sausage-shop to buy something; he simply refused to go; 'I'm busy,' he said. 'But you're obliged to,' I said. 'Oh no, I'm not,' he said; 'you haven't paid my mistress her rent, so I'm not obliged to you.' I wasn't going to have an uneducated peasant insulting me, and I told him he was a fool; to which he replied: 'And you're another one.' I think he must have been drunk, to say such an offensive thing to me – and indeed I said to him: 'You're drunk, you peasant!' To which he replied: 'Well, if I am it is not at your expense, you haven't got enough money to get drunk yourself; you even go begging

for a few copecks from some woman or other.' And then he added: 'And you're a gentleman, too!' You see what it has come to, little mother? I'm ashamed to go on living, Varenka! Like some kind of outcast; worse than a vagrant without a passport. It is a terrible disaster! -it is the end of me, quite simply the end! The irreversible end!

M.D.

August 13

Dearest Makar Alekseyevich,

It's just one thing after another, I myself no longer know what to do! What is to become of you now? As for myself, things do not look too rosy for me; today I burned my left hand with the iron; I let it fall by accident, and it bruised me and burned me, both at the same time. I cannot possibly do any work, and Fedora has been ill for three days now. I am in an agonizing state of agitation. I send you thirty copecks in silver; it is practically the last money we have left; oh, as God is my witness, how I should have liked to be able to help you now in your privations. It hurts me to the point of tears, not to be able to do so! Goodbye, my friend! You would bring me great consolation if you would come and visit us today.

V. D.

August 14

Makar Alekseyevich! What has got into you? You must have lost your fear of God! You are simply driving me out of my mind. Are you not ashamed? You will be your own undoing. Just think of your reputation! You are an honest, decent, self-respecting man – well, what will you do when everyone hears of you? You will simply die of shame! Have you no fear of God? Fedora told me that she refuses to help you any more, and I won't give you any more money, either. What have you brought me to, Makar Alekseyevich? I expect you probably think I don't care that you behave so badly; you don't know what I have to endure because of you! I can't even go up and down our stairs: everyone stares at me and points to me with their fingers, and they say such terrible things; yes, they say quite openly that I've *taken up with a drunkard*. Think what I feel when I hear that! When you are brought back here all the lodgers point at you with contempt: 'Look,' they say, 'they've brought that clerk back again.' And I can't endure the shame I feel for you. I swear to you that I will move away from here. I'll go and work somewhere as a housemaid or a laundrywoman, but I won't stop here. I wrote asking you to come and visit me, but you never did. My tears and entreaties evidently mean nothing to you, Makar Alekseyevich! And where did you get the money from, in any case? In the Lord's name, take care! I mean, you will come to ruin, you will come to ruin for nothing! And the shame, the ignominy! The landlady refused to let you in last night, you spent the night in the outhouse: I know everything. If you knew how wretched I felt when I learned of it. Please come and see me, visiting us will cheer you up: we'll read together, we'll remember old times. Fedora will tell us about the religious pilgrimages she was on. Please, for my sake, my dear friend, don't bring about your own undoing and my own. After all, I live for you alone, and it is for your sake that I am remaining with you. And this is how you behave! Be a decent man, steadfast in misfortune; remember that poverty is not a sin. And indeed, what reason is there for despair? It is all just temporary! With God is good will, everything will come right again – only now you must exercise self-control. I send you twenty copecks, buy some tobacco with it or whatever takes your fancy, only don't, for the love of God, spend it on drink. Come and see us, come and see us without fail. Perhaps you'll feel ashamed, the way you did last time, but don't: it is a false shame. Just bring some genuine repentance with you. Trust in God. He will arrange everything for the best.

V. D.

19 August

Varvara Alekseyevna, little mother!

I am put to shame, Varvara Alekseyevna, my treasure, I am utterly put to shame. But in the end, little mother, what is so special about all this? Why not cheer one's heart a little? When the soles of my boots fall off I don't give them any thought, because a boot-sole is rubbish, and will always be nothing more than an ordinary, vile, dirty boot-sole. And boots themselves are rubbish, too! If the Greek sages could go around without boots, why should a fellow like me waste time fussing over such undignified objects? So, in that case, why insult me, why treat me with contempt? Oh, little mother, little mother, these are fine things you write to me! And you can tell Fedora that she is a quarrelsome, flighty, disorderly woman, and what is more a stupid one, unspeakably stupid! As for my grey hair, you are wrong about that, my dear, because I am not nearly as old as you think I am. Yemelya sends you his greetings. You say in your letter that you have been grieving and weeping; well, I will tell you that I have been grieving and weeping, too. In conclusion I wish you happiness and good health; as for myself, I am happy and in good health, too, and remain, my little angel,

Your friend,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

August 21

Varvara Alekseyevna, Dear Madam and kind friend,

I feel that it is all my fault, I feel that I have sinned in your regard, and in my opinion there is no advantage to be derived from that at all, little mother, from the fact that I feel all that, whatever you may say. I felt it all even before my misdemeanour, but then my spirits sank with the consciousness of my guilt. My little mother, I am not a man of ill will, I am not hard-hearted; but in order to torture your little heart, my dove, one would have to be no more nor less than a bloodthirsty tiger, and, well, I possess the heart of a lamb and have, as you know, no disposition towards greed; consequently, my little angel, I am not entirely to blame for my misdemeanour, since neither my feelings nor my thoughts were to blame; and indeed, I don't know what was to blame. It is a puzzling business, little mother! You sent me thirty copecks in silver, and then twenty in copper; my heart began to ache as I surveyed your orphan's mite. You had burned your little hand, you would soon be going hungry yourself, yet you told me to buy tobacco. Well, what was I to do in such a position? Was I, like some bandit, to start plundering you, a little orphan? It was at that point that my spirits sank, little mother; that is to say, at first, being overwhelmed by the feeling that I was no good for anything and was little better than the sole of one of my own boots, I thought it improper for me to believe myself of any consequence, and started to view myself as something improper and, to a certain degree, indecent. Well, once I had lost all respect for myself, once I had abandoned myself to the denial of all my good qualities and of my own sense of self-worth, then I was done for, my downfall was assured! It is all predetermined by fate, and I am not to blame for it. I started off by going out for a breath of fresh air. Then it was just one thing after another: nature was so lachrymose, the weather was cold, it was raining, and, well, Yemelya happened to come along. He had already pawned everything he owned, Varenka, all his things had found another home, and when I met him he hadn't had a drop of poppy-dew in his mouth for two whole days, so he was at the stage of trying to pawn what can't be pawned, because it is not the kind of thing that is acceptable as security. Well, you see, Varenka, I gave in more out of compassion for suffering humanity than because I felt that way inclined. That is how that sin came to be committed, little mother! He and I wept together! We talked about you. He is a good, a thoroughly good man, and one of great feeling. I feel all this myself, little mother; that is the reason why all these things happen, because I feel it all so intensely. I know how much I owe you, my little dove! When I got to know you, I began, for a start, to know myself better, and I came to love you; before you came along, my little angel, I was lonely and as good as asleep, I wasn't really living in the world at all. They, my ill-wishers, said that even my appearance was indecent; they treated me with repugnance, and, well, I began to share it. They said I was stupid, and I really believed

them. When you came my way you lit up the whole of my dark life, so that my heart and my soul were illumined, and I attained tranquillity of mind, founded in the knowledge that I was no worse than other men; with the one reservation that I had no outstanding abilities of any kind, that I had no gloss, no style – but for all that, I was a human being, with the thoughts and feelings of a human being. Well, but now, feeling that I was being hounded by fate and that, humiliated by her, I had abandoned myself to the denial of my own sense of self-worth, I let my spirits sink, dejected by the calamities that had befallen me. And as you now know everything, little mother, I beg you in tears not to show any further inquisitiveness about that matter, as my heart is breaking, and I am in the most bitter distress.

I bear testimony, little mother, to my continued esteem for you, and remain your faithful,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

September 3

I did not finish my last letter to you, Makar Alekseyevich, because I have been feeling too heavy of heart to be able to write. Sometimes I have moments when I am glad to be alone – to be sad alone, depressed alone, without sharing my mood – and such moments are beginning to visit me more and more often. In my memories there is something I find inexplicable, something which absorbs me so instinctively and so powerfully that for several hours at a stretch I am oblivious to all that surrounds me and forget everything, everything that is in the present. In the life I am presently leading there is nothing, whether pleasant, grievous or sad, which does not remind me of something similar in my past, above all in my childhood, my golden childhood! But after such moments are past I always have a heavy heart. I seem to lose my strength, my reverie exhausts me; and my health is getting worse and worse, even without this additional strain. But today the fresh, bright, radiant morning, of which in autumn here there are but few, brought me back to life, and I greeted it with joy. So, autumn is with us already! How I used to love autumn in the country! I was just a child in those days, but even then I experienced a great many feelings. I preferred the autumn evenings to the mornings. I can remember that just a few yards from our house, at the foot of the hill, there was a lake. That lake – I seem to see it now – that lake was so wide and light, as pure as crystal! Sometimes, if the wind had died, the lake would be calm; there was not a rustle from the trees that grew along the shore, the water was as still as a mirror. So fresh, so cold! The dew would be settling on the grass, the lights would start to glimmer in the izbas* along the shore, a herd of cattle would be being driven home – it was then that I would slip stealthily out of the house in order to look at my lake, and I would lose myself in its contemplation. Right by the edge of the water the fishermen would have a faggot burning, and its light would flow far, far away, out over the water. The sky was socold – darkblue, illumined at the horizon by red, fiery stripes, which became paler and paler; the moon would come out; the air would be so resonant that if a frightened bird were to flutter its wings, a reed to begin murmuring in the light breeze, or a fish to splash in the water – one could hear it all. A white vapour, delicate and transparent, would rise over the dark-blue water. The distant expanses grew dark; everything seemed to drown in the mist, and yet all that was close to was sharply defined, as if cut by achisel – theboat, the shore, the islands; a disused barrel, which had been left on the shore, now bobbing slightly in the water, the branch of a willow tangling its yellowed leaves with the reeds – then a late seagull would go flapping up, now diving into the cold water, now flapping up again and disappearing into the mist. I would become lost in contemplation and listening – I would feel wonderfully happy! Yet I was still only a young thing, a child... I loved the autumn so much – the late autumn, when the harvest is being brought in and all the work of the fields is coming to a close, when the sit-round gatherings are beginning in the peasant izbas, when everyone is waiting for winter. At that time of year everything grows gloomier, the yellow leaves strew the padhs along the edges of the bare woods, which turn dark blue, almost black –especially at evening, when a damp mist descends and the trees loom out of it like giants, like terrible, monstrous apparitions. I might delay in returning while out on a walk, fall behind the others, walk alone, quickening mystep – itwas sinister! I myself would be trembling like one of those leaves; there, I would think, at any moment some fearsome being will look out of that tree-hollow; and all the while the wind would be rushing through the woods, whistling, moaning and howling so dolefully, tearing the clusters

of leaves from the withered twigs, whirling them in the air; and, in a long, wide, noisy flock, the birds hurtling after them with wild, penetrating cries, turning the sky black as they covered it across. I would grow afraid, and then I would seem to hear someone's voice whispering: 'Run, run, child, don't delay; terrible things will happen here in a moment, run, child!' A sense of horror would grip my heart, and I would run and run until my breath gave out. I would reach home, panting; there it was noisy and cheerful; all of us children would be given work to do: shelling peas or seeding poppies. The damp firewood crackled in the stove; Mother would cheerfully supervise our cheerful work; our old nurse Ulyana would tell us about the old days, or relate terrifying stories about corpses and enchanters. We children would huddle together, girl companion against girl companion, and we would all have a smile on our lips. Then suddenly we would all fall silent... listen! A noise! Like someone knocking! But it would be nothing; just old Frolovna is spinning-wheel droning away; how we would laugh! And then at night we would be unable to sleep because we were so afraid; we would have such terrible dreams. Waking up in the middle of the night, I would not dare to stir, and shivered under the bedspread until daybreak. In the morning I would rise as fresh as a daisy. I would look out of the window: the fields would be covered in frost; the delicate hoarfrost of autumn hung from the bare branches; there would be a thin covering of ice on the lake; a white vapour would be rising over its surface; the birds would be singing merrily. The sun shone on everything with its brilliant rays, which would break the thin ice like glass. Everything was light, brilliant, happy! The fire would be crackling in the stove once more; we would all seat ourselves close to the samovar, and our black dog Polkan, chilled to the marrow from being out all night, would look in at the window with a friendly wag of his tail. A muzhik would ride by on his best horse, on his way into the woods to gather firewood. Everyone was so pleased, so happy!... Oh, what a golden time my childhood was!... Now I have begun to cry like a child, carried away in my memories. I remember it all so vividly, so vividly, all my past stands so clearly before me, and the present seems so lustreless, so gloomy!... How will this end, how will it all end? You know, I have a sort of conviction, a kind of certainty that I shall die this autumn. I am very, very ill. I often think about dying, but even so I don't want to die like this, and be buried here. It may be that I shall have to take to my bed again, as I did back in the spring, though I have still not recovered. Even now I feel very heavy of heart. Fedora has gone off somewhere for the whole day, and I am here alone. For some time now, however, I have been afraid to be left on my own; I keep imagining that there is someone else in the room with me, that someone is talking to me; especially when I start to muse about something and suddenly snap out of my musing, in such a way that I grow afraid. That is why I have written you such a long letter; when I write, that feeling passes. Goodbye: I shall finish now, because I have no more paper nor time. Of the money I got from pawning my dresses and my hat I have only a ruble in silver left. You have given your landlady two rubles in silver; that is fine, now she will keep quiet for a bit.

Try to get your clothes mended somehow. Goodbye; I am so tired; I don't know why I am growing so weak; the slightest exertion wears me out. If work comes my way, how shall I be able to do it? That is the thought that really breaks my spirit.

V. D.

September 5

Varenka, my little dove!

I have had a great many experiences today, my little angel. For one thing I have had a headache all day. In order to try to obtain some relief, I took a walk along the Fontanka. It was a damp, dark evening. It is already dark by six o'clock now – there's a fine thing for you! There was no rain, but the fog was making up for it. Long swathes of dark cloud were passing across the sky. A huge multitude of people was making its way along the embankment, and to fit the general mood they all had the most fearful, depressing faces; drunken muzhiks, snubnosed Finnish peasant women, booted and bareheaded, workmen, cabbies, people like yours truly, out on some errand; boys, some locksmith's apprentice in a

striped overall, haggard and sickly looking, his face covered in sooty oil, a lock in his hand; a retired soldier, as tall as a building – that was the sort of public it was. It was evidently the time of day when no other kind of public shows its face. The Fontanka is a navigable canal, after all. There is such a vast number of barges that one wonders how they can all get in. Peasant women sit on the bridges with soggy honeycakes and rotten apples – they are all such sodden, dirty women. It is not much fun walking along the Fontanka! Wet granite under one is feet, on either side tall, black, sooty houses; fog under one is feet, and fog above one is head. That is the sort of sad, dark evening it was today.

When I turned into Gorokhovaya Street it was already quite dark, and the gas was being lit. I haven't been in Gorokhovaya Street for quite a little while – it is not a privilege that is been accorded to me. What a noisy street it is! Such shops, such rich department stores; everything fairly burns and glitters – the materials, the flowers under glass, the various hats with ribbons. You might think that all this had simply been displayed here for show – but that is not the case—I mean, there are people who buy all these things and make a present of them to their wives. A wealthy street! A lot of German bakers live in Gorokhovaya Street; they must also be very well-to-do. All those carriages constantly driving by; how does the paving stand it? There are sumptuous equipages, with windows as glossy as mirrors, and velvet and silk inside; they have aristocratic footmen, wearing epaulettes and swords. I looked into all the carriages, in every one of them there were ladies who were all dressed up, perhaps they were princesses or countesses. It must have been the hour when they all hurry to balls and assemblies. I would be curious to see what princesses and aristocratic ladies in general look like close to; very nice, I should think; I've never seen; except as I saw today, when I looked into those carriages. Then I remembered you. Oh, my little dove, my darling! When I remember you now, my heart aches within me! Why are you so unfortunate, Varenka? My little angel! In what way are you inferior to them? I think you are kind, lovely, versed in learning; so why should such a wicked fate fall to your lot? Why does it always happen that a good person lives in desolation, while happiness comes to another unasked? I know, I know, little mother, that it is not right to think that way, that that is free-thinking; but in all candour, in all truth, why does the raven fate croak fortune to one child still in its mother is womb, while another comes into God is world by way of the foundling hospital? I mean, it's often the case that fortune is granted to Ivan the Fool. It's as if someone were to say: 'You, Ivan, may put your hand in the familial moneybags, eat, drink and be merry; but you, whatever-your-name-is, can eat your heart out – that is all you're fit for, my good fellow!' It's sinful, little mother, it's sinful to think like that, but in this case sin has a way of stealing into one is heart without one being able to do much about it. I wish you could also ride in one of those carriages, my darling, my treasure. Generals would seek the favour of a well-disposed glance from you – not yours truly; you would wear, not that old unbleached gown, but silk and gold. You would not be thin and unhealthy looking as you are at present, but would look like a sugarplum fairy – fresh, plump, and rosy-cheeked. And then the only thing that would make me happy would be to catch a glimpse of you from the street at your brightly lit windows, even just a glimpse of your shadow; the mere thought that you were so happy and gay up there would make me happy too, my pretty little bird. Yet how are things now? It is not enough that wicked people have ruined you, that some worthless trash, some loose debauchee has insulted you. Just because his coat fits him like a glove, because he can look at you through his gold pince-nez, the shameless villain, he can do as he pleases, and you must listen to his indecent talk with indulgence! Enough Enough, I say! And why is it like this? Oh, because you're an orphan, because you're defenceless, because you have no powerful friend who could give you some decent support. But I mean, what sort of man is this, what sort of people are these who think nothing of insulting an orphan? They are trash, not people, simply trash; they are just names in a book, they don't really exist, of that I am certain. That is what they are like, these people! But in my opinion, my darling, that hurdy-gurdy man I ran into today in Gorokhovaya Street inspires more respect than they do. He may spend the whole day hanging about waiting for some miserable, grubby half-copeck on which he can subsist, yet for all that he is his own master, and supports himself. He doesn't want to beg for alms; so he toils in order to give people entertainment, like a clockwork automaton– 'Look' he says, 'I'm doing what I can to give you entertainment.' he is destitute, of course, there's no denying that; but he is destitute in a noble sort of way; he is tired, he is chilled to the bone, but still he toils, in his own, peculiar way, maybe,

but he toils. And there are many of these honest people, little mother, who although they earn but little in proportion to the usefulness of their labour, bow to no one and beg for alms from no one. I, too, am like that hurdy-gurdy man – that is to say, not really like him at all, but in my own way, in my own noble, aristocratic way, I am just like him – I toil as I am able, I do what I can, in other words. More than that I cannot offer; what can't be cured must be endured.

I have mentioned this hurdy-gurdy man, little mother, because today I have had occasion to experience an especially keen sense of my own poverty. I had stopped to look at the hurdy-gurdy man. There were all these thoughts swarming about in my head – so, in order to divert myself, I stopped. Among the spectators, apart from myself, there were some cabbies, some prostitute or other, and a little girl who was all covered in grime. The hurdy-gurdy man had stationed himself in front of the windows of someone's house. I noticed a street-urchin, a little boy, who must have been about ten; he would have been pretty, but he looked so weak and ill; he was dressed in a shirt and not much else, and stood there practically barefoot, listening to the music open-mouthed – like the child he was! He stared in wonderment as the German dolls danced; his own arms and legs were stiff with cold, he was shivering, and nibbling the end of one of his sleeves. I observed that he was holding a small sheet of paper in his hand. A gentleman walked by and threw the hurdy-gurdy man some coin of little value; it landed right inside the hurdy-gurdy man's box, which had a small surround on which was depicted a Frenchman dancing with some ladies. At the clink of the coin, the little boy gave a start and timidly looked round, evidently supposing that I had thrown the money. He came running up to me, his little hands trembling and his little voice quavering, held the sheet of paper out to me and said: 'Here is a letter!' I unfolded it. It was the usual thing: 'Dear Benefactor, a mother with children is dying, she has three and they are hungry, so if you will please help us, and not forget my little fledglings, when I die I will not forget you in the next world, my benefactor.' Well, that was clear enough, there was nothing unusual about it, but what did I have to give them? So I didn't give them anything. But how sorry I felt for him! The boy looked so wretched, he was blue with cold and probably hungry as well, and he was in earnest, oh yes, he was in earnest; I know a bit about these things. What is bad is that these scurvy mothers don't look after their children and go sending them out with letters half-naked in cold weather like this. Perhaps she is a stupid peasant woman with no strength of character; and perhaps she has no one to go out and work for her, so she just sits cross-legged and is genuinely ill. But she could still apply in the quarters where such cases are dealt with. On the other hand, perhaps she is just a fraud, purposely sending a hungry, feeble child out to dupe people, and thereby making him ill. And what does the poor boy learn from handing out these letters? His heart merely grows hardened; he goes around, runs up to people, begging. The people are going about their business, and they have no time. Their hearts are stony; their words are cruel: 'Be off with you! Go away! You won't make a monkey out of me!' That is what he hears from everyone's lips. His child's heart grows hardened, and the poor frightened boy shivers for nothing in the cold, like a little bird that has fallen out of a broken nest. His arms and legs are frozen; he gasps for breath. The next time you see him, he is coughing; it is not long before illness, like some unclean reptile, creeps into his breast, and when you look again, death is already standing over him in some stinking corner somewhere, and there is no way out, no help at hand – there you have his entire life! That is what life can be like! Oh, Varenka, it is so agonizing to hear those words 'For the love of Christ', and to walk on, and give the boy nothing, to say to him: 'God will provide.' Some 'For the love of Christ' are not so bad. (There are various kinds of them, little mother.) Others are long-drawn-out, habitual, studied – a beggar is stock-in-trade; it is not so hard to refrain from giving to one of those – he is an inveterate beggar, one of long standing, a beggar by trade; he's used to it, you think, he'll get over it, he knows how to get over it. But another will be unpractised, coarse, terrible – as today when, just as I was about to take the letter from the boy, a man standing by the fence, who was selecting the people he asked for money, said to me: 'Give me a half-a-copeck, *barin*, for the love of Christ!' in such a rude, abrupt voice that I shuddered with a sense of terrible emotion, but did not give him a half-copeck: I didn't have one. And then again, there's the fact that rich people don't like the poor to complain of their lot out loud – they say they are causing trouble, being importunate! Yes, poverty is always importunate – perhaps those groans of hunger keep the rich awake!

To tell you the truth, my dear, I began describing all this to you partly in order to unburden my heart, but more particularly in order to provide you with an example of the good style of my literary compositions. Because I think you will probably agree, little mother, that my style has improved of late. But now I am visited by such sickness of heart that I have begun to feel my thoughts in the depths of my soul, and although I am aware, little mother, that this feeling will not get me anywhere, I none the less believe that I am in a certain sense doing myself justice. And really, my darling, I often take the wind out of my own sails for no reason at all, I consider myself not worth a pinch of salt, class myself among the lowest of the low. To use a comparison: perhaps this happens because, like that poor boy who begged me for alms, I myself am bullied and overworked. Now I shall express this to you by way of example and allegory, little mother; listen to this: sometimes, my darling, early in the morning when I am hurrying to work, I have occasion to take a glance at the city as it is waking up and getting out of bed, emitting its vapours, seething and rumbling – sometimes this spectacle makes one feel so small that it is though someone had given one a slap on one is inquisitive nose, and one trudges onwards with a shrug of one is shoulders, as quiet as a mouse. Now, just take a look at what is going on in those big, black, sooty buildings, investigate it thoroughly, and you yourself will be able to tell whether I had good reason to class myself as the lowest of the low and to be cast into an undignified state of confusion. Observe, Varenka, that I express myself allegorically, not in a direct sense. Well, let's take a look: what is there in those buildings? There, in some smoky corner, in some dank bolthole which must out of necessity serve as a lodging, some artisan is waking from slumber; all night he has been dreaming, let us say, of the boots which the day before he inadvertently cut a hole in, as though anyone ought to spend a whole night dreaming about such rubbish! But he is an artisan, a cobbler: it is excusable for him to think about his specialty all the time. His children are clamouring and his wife is hungry; and it is not just cobblers who sometimes get out of bed in the morning feeling like that, little mother. That would be of no consequence, and would not be worth writing about; but you see, little mother, there is something else to be taken into account: right there, in the same building, on the storey above or below, in his gilded chambers, a very rich personage has been dreaming in the night about those very same boots – in a different aspect, of course, from a different point of view, but still about those boots; for in the sense I am here implying, little mother, we are all, my darling, to a certain extent cobblers. Even that would be of no consequence, except that it is bad that there should be no one at that very rich personage is side, no one who might whisper in his ear the words: 'Come now, that is enough of thinking only about this subject, of thinking only about yourself, living only for yourself; you're not a cobbler, your children are healthy and your wife isn't begging for food; take a look around you – can't you find a more noble subject for your concern than your boots?' That is what I wanted to say to you in this allegorical manner, Varenka. It is, my dear, possibly too radical a thought, but it is a thought that is sometimes there, that sometimes visits one and then emerges from one is heart in ardent words. And so there was no reason to consider oneself not worth a pinch of salt, and let oneself be frightened by all the noise and thunder! I will conclude, little mother, by supposing you may wonder if I am spouting slander, or have been overtaken by an attack of spleen, or have copied all this out of some book or other. No, little mother, you may dispose of any such illusions: I loathe slander, I haven't had an attack of spleen, and I didn't copy this out of any book – so there!

I arrived home in a melancholy state of mind, sat down at the table, warmed my teapot and made myself a couple of glasses of tea. Suddenly I saw Gorshkov, our poor lodger, coming towards me. Earlier, on the morning of that day, I had noticed him poking about near the other residents and looking as though he wanted to come up to me. I should tell you in passing, little mother, that he is far worse off than I am. Far, far worse off! He has a wife and children! If I were in his shoes, I don't know what I should do. Well, anyway, our Gorshkov came in and bowed, a tear festering in his eyelashes as always, shuffling his feet and unable to get a word out. I made him sit down on my other chair – it's broken, I know, but it must suffice. I offered him some tea. He kept trying to give me reasons why he shouldn't have any, went on for ages about that, but he finally accepted a glass. He would have drunk it without sugar, and began once more to resist when I tried to persuade him to take some, spent a long time arguing and refusing, and finally put the very smallest lump in his glass, assuring me that the tea I had given him was unusually sweet. Oh, what humiliations people are driven to by

poverty! 'Well, what is it, old fellow?' I said to him. 'Oh, it's like this, Makar Alekseyevich, my benefactor,' he said. 'Show the Lord's mercy and help my unhappy family; I've a wife and children, and they have nothing to eat; think how hard that is for me to bear as a father!' I started to reply, but he broke me off: 'I'm scared of all the people here, Makar Alekseyevich – that is to say, I'm not so much scared of them, as, well, you know, ashamed in front of them; they're all such a proud and conceited lot. Normally I wouldn't have bothered you, my friend and benefactor: I know that you yourself have been in difficulties, I know that you're not in a position to give me much, but at least lend me something. Also,' he said, 'I've made so bold as to ask you because I know you have a kind heart, I know that you yourself have been in need, that you are even now experiencing misfortunes – and that your heart will therefore feel compassion.' He concluded by asking me to forgive him for his 'insolence and impropriety'. I replied that I would like nothing better than to lend him some money, but that I had none, absolutely nothing. 'Makar Alekseyevich, old chap,' he said to me, 'it's not much I'm asking for, it's just that what with one thing and another (here he blushed all over) my wife and children are hungry – if you could even just spare me a copper or two.' Well, when I heard that I felt a tug at my heart. 'Why,' I thought, 'they're even worse off than I am!' But all I had left was twenty copecks, and I needed it all: I was going to spend it the following day on my most basic requirements. 'No, my dear fellow, I can't; what with one thing and another,' I said. 'Please, Makar Alekseyevich, old chap, give me something, however little, even if it's just ten copecks,' he replied. Well, little mother, I took my twenty copecks out of my money-box and gave it to him: it was my good deed for the day! Oh, poverty! I engaged him in conversation. 'How is it, old chap, that you're in such a plight, yet you're renting a room that costs five silver rubles a month?' He explained to me that he had taken the room six months earlier and had paid three months' rent in advance; then, however, circumstances had conspired against him in such a way that he did not know which way to turn, poor fellow. He had hoped that his case would be settled by this time. But it's an unsavoury sort of case he is got himself into. You see, Varenka, he is up before the courts for something. he is litigating with some merchant or other who swindled the state authorities over the matter of a contract; the deception was found out and the merchant was arrested, but he managed to implicate Gorshkov in his criminal deeds, and Gorshkov was in some way involved in them. But in actual fact Gorshkov was only guilty of negligence, imprudence and inexcusable dereliction of the state's interests. The case has been going on for several years now: various obstacles keep cropping up in Gorshkov's way, making it impossible for him to clear his name. 'As regards the dishonesty of which I'm accused,' Gorshkov tells me, 'I'm not guilty, not guilty at all, and I'm not guilty of swindling and robbery either.' This case has besmirched his reputation somewhat; he has been fired from the service, and although he has not been found guilty of any crime on the statute-books, until he has been completely acquitted he can't get back from the merchant a certain whopping sum of money which he is owed and which is now the subject of a court dispute. I believe him, but the court won't accept his word for it; it's one of those cases in which there are so many ins and outs that you'd never unravel them all in a hundred years. No sooner have a few of them been ironed out than the merchant produces some more. I feel really sorry for Gorshkov, my dear, and I know what he is going through. The man has no job; no one will take him on because of his unreliable reputation; they've used up all the money they had saved, on food; the case is full of complications, yet meanwhile they needed to live; and meanwhile, without particular intention on their part, and quite unsuitably, a child was born – well, that involved expense; the son fell ill – more expense, and died – yet more expense; his wife is ill; she has some chronic ailment or other: in other words he is been suffering, suffering badly. He says, however, that he expects a satisfactory decision on his case in a few days' time, and that this time there can be no doubt of it whatsoever. I felt sorry, sorry, oh, so sorry for him, little mother! I showed him kindness. he is a lost, frightened man; he is looking for someone to look after him, and that is why I showed him kindness. Well, goodbye, little mother, Christ be with you, keep well. My little dove! I have only to remember you, and it is like having a medicine applied to my sick soul, and even though I suffer for you, that suffering is easy for me.

Your true friend,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

September 9

Varvara Alekseyevna, Little Mother!

I am beside myself as I write this to you. I am thoroughly agitated by a terrible thing which has happened. My head is whirling round. I feel as though everything were spinning around me. Oh, my darling, what a thing I have to tell you now! This we did not foresee. No, I do not believe that I did not foresee it; I foresaw it all. My heart sensed it in advance! I even dreamed of something similar the other night.

This is what happened! I shall tell you without regard for style, just as the Good Lord puts the words into my head. I went to the department today. I arrived, sat down, and started to write. I should also tell you, little mother, that I had been writing the day before as well. Well, it was like this: Timofey Ivanovich came to me yesterday with an order for a document which was required in a hurry. 'Please copy it cleanly, swiftly and carefully, Makar Alekseyevich,' he said. 'It is to be signed today.' I should observe, little angel, that I was not quite myself yesterday, and had no interest in anything; such were the sadness and depression that had overtaken me. My heart was cold and my soul was dark; my memory held nothing but you, my poor little treasure. Well, so I got down to the task of copying; I did the work cleanly and well, except that – I don't know how to explain it to you, whether it was the work of the Unclean One, whether it had been preordained by some secret Fate, or whether it simply had to happen that way – I left out a whole line; Lord knows what sense it must have made, it simply didn't make any. There was a delay over the delivery of the document, and it wasn't handed to His Excellency for signature until today. I reported for work this morning at the usual time and stationed myself beside Yemelyan Ivanovich. I should observe to you, my dear, that I have recently begun to feel twice as ashamed and apologetic as I used to. I've recently begun to find it impossible to look at anyone. If anyone is chair so much as gives a creak, I feel more dead than alive. That was how it was today: I sat huddled up, not making a sound, like a hedgehog, with the result that Yefim Akimovich (there never was such a bully) said so that everyone could hear: 'What are you sitting there looking so scared for, Makar Alekseyevich?' And he made such a face that absolutely everyone near us split their sides with laughter, at my expense, of course. They laughed, and they laughed! I stuck my fingers in my ears and shut my eyes, just sat there, not moving. That is what I usually do; that way they usually desist sooner. Suddenly I heard noise, the sound of running footsteps, fuss and bustle; I listened – surely my ears must be deceiving me? My name was being called, someone was asking for me, for Devushkin. My heart began to quiver within me, and I still don't really know why I was so scared; all I know is that I was more scared than I have ever been in my life before. I became rooted to my chair – although nothing were wrong, as though I were not even there. But again the voice started up, coming nearer and nearer. At last it was right next to my ear: 'Devushkin! Devushkin! Where is Devushkin?' I raised my eyes: before me stood Yevstafy Ivanovich; he said: 'Makar Alekseyevich, you've to go to His Excellency, at the double! You've made a mistake in a document!' That was all he said, but it was enough, little mother, don't you think! I went numb, froze, lost all feeling; and began to walk, more dead than alive. I was escorted through one room, through a second, then a third, into a study – I stood before His Excellency! It is impossible for me to give you a positive account of the thoughts that passed through my mind at that moment. I saw His Excellency standing there, and they were all standing around him. I don't think I bowed; I forgot. Struck dumb, I merely stood there, my lips trembling and my legs shaking. And I had reason to be struck dumb, little mother. For one thing, I was ashamed of myself; I took a glance in a mirror to the right of me, and what I saw in it nearly sent me out of my mind. And for another, I have always tried to do my job as though I myself were not actually there. So that it was hardly likely that His Excellency could know of my existence. Perhaps he might have heard in passing, as it were, that there was a member of staff named Devushkin in the department, but he would never have had any close dealings with him.

Angrily, he began: 'What is the meaning of this, sir? Where was your concentration? An important document, urgently required, and you go and spoil it. What is the meaning of it, eh?' At that point His Excellency turned to Yevstafy Ivanovich. I could only hear certain isolated words and phrases: 'Negligence! Indiscretion! You will get us into trouble!'

For some reason I suddenly had an urge to open my mouth. I wanted to beg forgiveness, but could not, I wanted to flee, but dared not attempt to, and then... then, little mother, something happened that even now makes the pen want to fall from my hand. One of my metal buttons – the devil take it – a button which had been hanging from my uniform by a thread – suddenly fell off (I must have brushed against it by accident), bounced on the floor with a ping, and rolled straight, just like that, the accursed object, to His Excellency's feet – and this while everyone was completely silent, too! There went any hope I might have had of excusing myself, of making an apology, of accounting for my misdeed – all the things I had been preparing to say to His Excellency! What happened next was dreadful. His Excellency at once fastened his attention on my appearance and on what I was wearing. I recalled what I had seen in the mirror: I rushed to retrieve the button! I lost my head! I stooped down and tried to get hold of the button, but it spun and rolled, in short, I couldn't catch hold of it, and gave a fine display of dexterity in the process. Then I suddenly felt the last of my strength desert me, and knew that all, all was lost! My entire reputation was ruined, I was finished as a human being! And then, for no reason at all, I started to hear the voices of Teresa and Falcon, and my ears began to ring. At last I managed to retrieve the button, got to my feet, straightened myself up, and had I not been such a fool I would have stood to attention and kept still. But oh, no: I began pressing the button against the torn-off threads, as though that would make it stay on again; and, what is more, I smiled, and smiled again. At first His Excellency turned away, but then he glanced at me again – I could hear him saying to Yevstafy Voinovich: 'What on earth?... Look at the state he is in!... How does he... What does he...' Oh, my darling, the sound of those words! I knew that this time I had truly excelled myself! I heard Yevstafy Voinovich say: 'He has a good record, has never put a foot wrong – exemplary conduct, draws a reasonable salary, in accordance with his grade...' Well, do something to ease his position,' said His Excellency. 'Give him something in advance.' 'But he's already been paid,' Yevstafy Voinovich replied. 'He's been paid in advance for ages now. He must be having some difficulties or other – but he's always shown good conduct, and he's got a good record, a spotless record.' I burned, my little angel, I burned in the fires of hell! I died inwardly! 'Well,' His Excellency said in a loud voice, 'it must be copied out again, and quickly; Devshkin, come here and copy it out again, without mistakes this time; and listen...' At that point His Excellency turned to the other people present and issued various instructions; then they all went their separate ways. No sooner had they dispersed than His Excellency hurriedly took out his pocket-book and produced a hundred ruble note from it. 'Here,' he said. 'It is the least I can do, look on it as you please...' – and he shoved it into my hand. My angel, I gave a start of shock, my whole being was shaken; I don't know what came over me – I tried to kiss his hand. But he blushed all over, my little dove, and – I depart from the truth by not one hair's breadth, my darling – he took my unworthy hand and shook it, shook it properly as though it were the hand of someone who was his equal, someone equal in rank to himself, a general. 'Off you go,' he said, 'it is the least I can do... Don't make any more mistakes, but on this occasion we'll manage to get by.'

Now, little mother, this is what I have decided: I ask you and Fedora – and if I had any children, I would ask them, too – to say your prayers henceforth in the following manner: to pray, not for your fathers, but for His Excellency, and to do so each day and every day until the end of your lives! I also want to say this, little mother – and I say it solemnly, listen carefully, little mother: I swear that no matter how afflicted by mental agony I was in the cruel days of our misfortunes when I looked at you, at the miseries you had to suffer, and at myself, at my degradation and my incompetence, in spite of all that I swear that the hundred rubles are less dear to me than the fact that His Excellency himself deigned to shake my unworthy hand, wretch and drunkard that I am! By doing that he restored me to himself. By that action he has resurrected my spirit, has made my life sweeter for ever, and I am firmly convinced that, no matter how grievously I may have sinned in the eyes of the All-Highest, my prayer for the happiness and prosperity of His Excellency will reach His throne...

Little mother! I am now in a dreadful state of mental disarray and agitation! My heart is thumping as if it wanted to leap out of my breast. At the same time, I seem to have lost all my energy. I am sending you forty-five paper rubles; I am giving the landlady twenty, and leave thirty-five for myself: I'll spend twenty on setting my clothes to rights, and keep

fifteen for daily expenses. The only thing is that all these events which took place this morning have shaken my being to its foundations. I am going to go to bed. But I feel peaceful, very peaceful. Only there is a crack in my soul, and I can hear it trembling, quivering, stirring deep inside me. I shall come and see you: but for the moment I am simply intoxicated by all these sensations... God sees it all, my little mother, my priceless little dove!

Your worthy friend,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

September 10

My dear Makar Alekseyevich,

I cannot tell you how glad I am about your good fortune; and I can also understand the effect your superior is benevolent actions must have had on you, my friend. So now you can rest from your woes! Only for God is sake don't go wasting money again. Try to live as quiet, as modest an existence as possible, and starting from today begin putting something by each day so that misfortune may not take you unawares a second time. For heaven is sake don't worry about us. Fedora and I will get by somehow. Why have you sent us such a lot of money, Makar Alekseyevich? We really don't need it. We are content with what we have already. To be sure, we shall soon need money for our move from this apartment, but Fedora has hopes of receiving repayment of an old debt of many years. I shall, however, keep twenty rubles in case of emergencies. I am sending the rest back to you. Please look after it, Makar Alekseyevich. Goodbye. Live quietly now, look after your health and be of good cheer. I would write you more, but am experiencing a dreadful sense of tiredness – yesterday I stayed in bed all day. Your promise to look in is a sensible one. Please pay me a visit, Makar Alekseyevich.

V. D.

- p. 3 The epigraph is taken from a short story by V. F. Odoyevsky, *The Living Corpse* (1839).
- p. 6 Brambaw. 'Baron Brambeus' was the literary pseudonym of O. I. Senkovsky (1800-58), editor of the journal *Library for Reading*, whose articles and stories made him (as Gogol observes in *The Government Inspector*) one of the idols of the minor civil-servant classes, and of the less well-educated Russian reading public in general.
- p. 6 thirty-five paper rubles: assignatsii, paper money introduced into Russia in 1769, but replaced in 1843 by credit notes. In the 1830s one paper ruble was equivalent to twenty-seven silver copecks.
- p. 7 Devushkin: the name is derived from the Russian word *devushka*, 'a girl'.
- p. 9 Dobroselova: the name means 'good village'.
- p. 15 an assessor in Tula: possibly a quotation from Pushkin's *Fragments from Onegin's journey*:
Why, like an assessor in Tula,
Am I not lying in a palsy?
- p. 15 Teresa and Faldoni: the names of the unhappy lovers in the sentimental novel of the same name by the French writer N. G. Léonard (1744-93). The novel was translated into Russian in 1804, and became a popular success.
- p. 16 Such temperate weather: a reference to *The Divine Liturgy of Our Fathers Among the Saints John Chrysostom and Basil the Great*: 'For temperate weather, abundance of fruits of the earth, and for peaceful seasons, let us pray to the Lord' (*The Orthodox Liturgy*, SPCK, 1982).
- p. 19 it hardly gets dark at night now: in Leningrad (St Petersburg) the end of May is the season of 'White nights'.
- p. 21 the St Petersburg Side: the St Petersburg side of the River Neva, facing the 'Vyborg Side'.
- p. 22 Lomond's grammar: *A Complete French Grammar, Comprising the Rules of Pronunciation, Composition and Spelling of Words, Composed by Lomond, and Corrected and Supplemented by Letelier*, Moscow, 1831.
- p. 23 Zapol'sky's: *A New Textbook of the French Language, Comprising an Alphabet, Etymology, Syntax and Examples*, published by V. Zapol'sky, Moscow, 1817.
- p. 37 the complete collection of Pushkin's works in the most recent edition: the first posthumous edition of Pushkin's Works, which were published in St Petersburg during the years 1838-41 in eleven volumes.
- p. 54 the Kamenny Poyas: a region of Siberia.
- p. 56 a Romany wine: Romaney, a sweet wine.
- p. 56 Paul de Kock: French novelist (1793-1871) who wrote bawdy, sentimental novels about Paris life, which were very popular abroad, particularly in England and Russia.
- p. 57 Tales of Belkin: this is probably the first edition (1831) of Pushkin's collection of short stories.
- p. 62 The Picture of Man: *The Picture of Man, an Edifying Treatise on Aspects of Self-knowledge for All the Educated Classes*, Drawn by A. Galich, St Petersburg, 1834. The psychologist and philosopher A. I. Galich (1783-1848) was one of Pushkin's teachers at the Tsarskoye Selo Lyceum. It is probable that Dostoyevsky heard extracts from the *Picture* read aloud at the family readings which took place in his childhood home.
- p. 62 The Little Bell-ringer: *Le Petit Sonneur*, a novel by the French sentimental-romantic writer F. G. Decray-Dumesnil (1761-1819).
- p. 62 The Cranes of Ibis: Schiller's well-known poem, in the Russian translation by V. A. Zhukovsky (1813).
- p. 62 The Stationmaster: one of Pushkin's Tales of Belkin. Samson Vyrin is the principal character in the story.
- p. 63 the vogue now was for books with illustrations and various kinds of description: in literary Russia, the 1840s were the period of the 'physiological sketch'. These sketches or 'descriptions' were usually accompanied by engraved illustrations depicting types – the representatives of the various estates and professions.
- p. 64 I am sending you a book... The Overcoat: the third volume of Gogol's Works, which appeared at the beginning of 1843, and in which *The Overcoat* received its first publication.
- p. 73 I met Yemelya: Yemelya appears again in Dostoyevsky's *The Honest Thief*, where his character receives further development as Yemelyan Ilyich.
- p. 80 some kind of fourteenth-class civil servant: the fourteenth class was the lowest category in the table of civil service ranks inaugurated by Peter the Great. p. 90 Lovelace: a seducer. From the name of the hero of Richardson's novel *Clarissa*.
- p. 95 izbas: huts, small wooden dwellings.
- p. 112 I read the Bee: the conservative newspaper *The Northern Bee*, published in St Petersburg from 1825 until 1864 by F. V. Bulgakov and N. I. Grech. Gogol mentions the Bee as the preferred reading of minor government clerks in his *The Diary of a Madman*.
- p. 122 canezou: sleeveless blouse.

September 11

My dear Varvara Alekseyevna,

I beg you, my darling, not to part from me now, not now, when my happiness is complete and I want for nothing. My little dove! Don't pay any attention to what Fedora says – I will do everything you ask; I will behave well and mind my P's and Q is – my respect for His Excellency alone prompts me to do that; we shall write each other happy letters again, we shall confide to each other our thoughts, our joys, and our concerns, if concerns there be; we shall live alongside each other in happiness and concord. We shall study literature... My little angel! My fortunes have changed, and everything has taken a turn for the better. The landlady has become more compliant, Teresa has become more intelligent, even Faldoni is quicker on his feet these days. I have settled my differences with Ratazyayev. I went to him of my own accord, to celebrate. I must admit he's a good fellow, little mother, and all the bad things people have been saying about him are a lot of nonsense. I have now discovered that all that was pernicious slander. He had absolutely no intention of writing about us: he told me that himself. He read me a new thing he's written. And when he called me 'Lovelace' that time, it wasn't meant as an insult or as some kind of improper epithet: he explained it to me. It's a straight borrowing from foreign literature, and means 'Mr Quick-On-His-Toes', and if one is to express it more elegantly, in more literary fashion, then it means 'a fellow with whom one should not meddle' – there! And not whatever it was I thought. It was an innocent joke, my little angel. And there I went, uneducated as I am, and foolishly took offence. And indeed, now I've apologized to him... The weather is first-rate today, Varenka, really fine. Oh, to be sure, there was a bit of drizzle this morning, which felt as though it had been strained through a sieve. But it was nothing! It made the air a bit fresher. I went out and bought a wonderful pair of boots. I strolled along the Nevsky. I read the *Bee** Oh! But I'm forgetting to tell you the most important part.

You see, this is what happened:

This morning I was talking to Yemelyan Ivanovich and Aksenty Mikhailovich about His Excellency. You know, Varenka, I am not the only person to whom he has been so generous. I am not the only person whom he has shown such favour – he is renowned for his kindheartedness far and wide. From many quarters people sing his praises, and shed tears of gratitude. He brought up an orphan girl in his house. He made all the arrangements for her: married her off to a certain man, a government clerk who lived in His Excellency's home and did special assignments. He got the son of a certain widow a position in a government office, and has done many other benevolent deeds of a similar kind. I considered it my duty, little mother, to make my own small contribution, and I told everyone about what His Excellency had done: I told them everything and concealed nothing. I swallowed my pride. What role could a thing like pride or reputation play in a situation like that? I told it all out loud – to the glory of the doings of His Excellency! I spoke enthusiastically and with ardour, and I did not blush – on the contrary, I was proud to have the occasion to tell such a story. I described it all to them (though I was sensible enough to keep quiet about you, little mother): my landlady, Faldoni, Ratazyayev, Markov, my boots – all of it. One or two of them exchanged smiles with one another; in fact, they all exchanged a few smiles. I expect they just thought there was something ridiculous about the way I looked, or perhaps it was what I told them about my boots – yes, that must have been it. But I don't believe they did it with any malicious intention. It was simply their youth, or the fact that they are rich; I absolutely refuse to believe that they were laughing at what I had to say with any evil or malicious intention. What I mean is that since I was saying it all in relation to His Excellency, they could not possibly have done that, could they, Varenka?

I still have not really recovered from it all, little mother. All these events have simply reduced me to confusion! Do you have firewood? Don't catch cold, Varenka; it is so easy to catch cold. Oh, my little mother, you will be the death of me with those melancholy thoughts of yours. I am entreating with God for you, how I am entreating with Him, little mother! That, for example, you should have woollen stockings and warm underclothes. Look to yourself, my little dove. If

you should need anything, then in the name of the Creator do not offend an old man. Just come straight to me. The bad times are over now. Do not worry on my account. Everything that lies ahead is so good and bright!

Yes, it was a sad time, Varenka! But never mind, it's gone, finished with. The years will roll by, and we will sigh even for that time. I remember the years of my youth. They couldn't have been better – though I frequently had not a copeck in my pocket. I was cold and hungry, but at least I was cheerful. I would walk down the Nevsky of a morning, encounter a pretty little face, and be happy all day afterwards. That was a glorious, glorious time, little mother! It is good to be alive, Varenka! Especially in St Petersburg. Yesterday I repented with tears in my eyes, asking the Lord God to forgive me all the sins I committed in that sad time: my discontent, my liberal ideas, my debauchery and gambling. I mentioned you in my prayers with tender emotion. It was you alone, my little angel, who gave me support, who consoled me, admonished me with your good counsel and your exhortations. I will never be able to forget that, little mother. I have kissed all your letters today, my little dove! Well, goodbye, little mother. I have been told that there are clothes being sold somewhere not far from here. So I shall see what I can find out. Goodbye, then, little angel. Goodbye!

Your sincerely devoted

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

September 15

Makar Alekseyevich, Sir,

I am in a dreadful state of agitation. Listen to what has happened to us. I have a premonition of something fateful. Judge for yourself, my precious friend: Mr Bykov is in St Petersburg. Fedora met him. He was driving by, ordered the droshky to stop, went up to Fedora himself and began to enquire where she lived. At first she wouldn't oblige him. Then he told her with an ironic smile that he knew who was living with her. (Anna Fyodorovna had apparently told him everything.) Then Fedora lost her patience and began to upbraid him and reproach him right there on the street, telling him that he was a man with no morals, that it was he who was the cause of all my unhappiness. He replied that when people haven't a copeck to their names they are bound to be unhappy. Fedora told him that I might well have been able to earn my living, might even have found a husband or, failing that, obtained a position somewhere, but that now my happiness was lost for ever, that I was ill, moreover, and would soon die. In reply to this he observed that I was still far too young, that my head was still in a ferment and that *even our virtues were getting a little tarnished* (his words). Fedora and I thought he didn't know where our apartment was, but then suddenly, yesterday, just after I had gone out to do some shopping in the Gostiny Dvor, he walked into our room; he apparently wished to avoid me. He spent a long time asking Fedora questions about the life we were leading; he examined all our possessions, looked at my work, and then asked: 'Who's this clerk who knows you?' At that moment you were crossing the yard; Fedora pointed you out to him; he looked, and smiled his ironic smile; Fedora begged him to go away, told him that I was already ill with distress as it was, and that to see him in our room would be very unpleasant for me. For a while he remained silent; then he said he had simply come to see us for want of anything better to do, and tried to give Fedora twenty-five rubles, which she of course refused. What would it have meant if she had accepted them? Why did he come to see us? I cannot fathom how it is that he knows all about us! I am lost in conjectures. Fedora says that her sister-in-law Aksinya who comes visiting us knows a washerwoman called Nastasya and that this Nastasya has a cousin who is a janitor in the same department where a friend of Anna Fyodorovna is nephew works – so isn't it possible that some malicious gossip has been going the rounds? But it may very well be that Fedora is mistaken; we don't know what to think. Will he really come to see us again? The very thought horrifies me! When Fedora told me all this yesterday I was so frightened that I nearly fainted from terror. What more does he want? I don't want to know him now! What business does he have with me, poor woman that I am? Oh, in what fear I live now; I keep thinking that Bykov will come in at any moment. What is to become of me? What else does fate have in store for me? For the love of Christ, come and see me now, Makar Alekseyevich. Please, for the love of God,

come and see me.

V. D.

September 18

Varvara Alekseyevna, little mother!

There took place in our lodging-house today an even that was unbearably sad, thoroughly inexplicable and quite unexpected. Our poor Gorshkov (I must tell you this first, little mother) has completely acquitted himself. The court's decision was made public a long time ago, but today he went to hear the final judgement. The case ended very happily for him. Whatever the suspicions of negligence and indiscretion that had been entertained against him, he was cleared of them all. The merchant was ordered to pay him a hefty sum of money, with the result that his circumstances were greatly improved; the stain on his honour was removed, and everything was better for him – in short, he had received the most complete fulfilment of his desires. He arrived home at three o'clock this afternoon. He looked terrible, his face was as white as a sheet, his lips were trembling, yet he was smiling – he embraced his wife and children. We all descended on him in a horde to congratulate him. He was thoroughly moved by our action, bowed in all directions, and shook hands with each of us several times. I even thought he had grown a few inches in height and straightened up, and he didn't have those tears in his eyes as he usually did. He was in such a state of agitation, poor chap. He couldn't keep still for two minutes on the same spot; he would pick up anything he chanced to find, then put it down again, smiling and bowing all the time without cease; he would sit down, stand up, sit down again, start talking – my, how he talked! – saying God only knows what: 'My honour, my honour, my good name, my children,' and even weeping. Most of us also shed a few tears. Ratazyayev clearly wished to cheer him up, and said: 'What good's honour, old chap, if you've nothing to eat; it's money, old chap, money that is the main thing; and it's that you should be thanking God for!' – and he slapped him on the shoulder. I thought Gorshkov looked offended; that's to say, he didn't actually express his displeasure openly, but just gave Ratazyayev a funny look and took his hand off his shoulder. He wouldn't have done that before, little mother! But people's characters differ. For example, if I had been so fortunate I would never have acted the proud fellow like that; I mean, my darling, sometimes one bows too much and humiliates oneself for the sole reason that one has suffered a fit of good will and excessive softness of heart... but it is not I we are talking about here! 'Yes,' he said, 'money's good too; praise be to God, praise be to God!' And after that, during all the time we remained in his room, he kept saying 'Praise be to God, praise be to God!' His wife ordered a rather special dinner, and lots of it. Our landlady cooked it for them herself. Our landlady is sometimes a kindhearted woman. But until the dinner was ready Gorshkov was unable to sit still. He went to see everyone in their rooms, whether they invited him in or not. He would simply walk in, smile, sit down on a chair, say a few words, or sometimes remain silent – and go away again. When he went to see the warrant-officer he even played cards; they made him join in as fourth hand in their game. He played for a while, then for a little while longer, made a mess of his hand, played three or four rounds and then gave up. 'No,' he said, 'but you see I'm just passing, that's all, just passing' – and left their company. When he ran into me in the passage he seized me by both hands and looked me straight in the face, only he did it in a thoroughly odd manner; then he shook my hand and wandered off, smiling all the while, but with a smile that was somehow strange and heavy, like that of a corpse. His wife was weeping for joy; everything in their room was so cheerful, as though it had been arranged for a holiday. They consumed their dinner quickly. After they had eaten, he said to his wife: 'Listen, my dear, I'm going to take a nap for a while,' and he went to bed. He called his daughter to his side, put his hand on her little head and stroked it for a long, long time. Then he turned to his wife once more: 'But what about Petenka?' he said. 'Petya, our Petenka?...' His wife made the sign of the cross over herself and replied that he was dead. 'Yes, yes, I know, I know it all, Petenka's in the kingdom of heaven now.' His wife could see that he was not himself, that the things which had taken place had completely shaken and astounded him, and she said to him: 'You ought to sleep for a while, my dear.' 'Yes, very well, in a moment I will... I'm a bit...' Here he turned

away, lay for a while, then turned back again and tried to say something. His wife couldn't make out what it was, and she asked him: 'What is it you want, my friend?' But he made no reply. She waited for a little. 'Well,' she thought, 'he is fallen asleep.' And she went to see the landlady for an hour or so. An hour later she returned – she saw that her husband had not yet woken up, and that he lay there without moving. In the belief that he was asleep, she sat down and began to busy herself with some work or other. She says now that she worked for half an hour and was so absorbed in her thoughts that she cannot even remember what it was she was thinking about, only that she had forgotten about her husband. Then a sense of alarm suddenly made her wake up, and what struck her most of all was the tomb-like silence in the room. She looked over at the bed and saw that her husband was still lying in the same position. She went over to him, tugged the coverlet aside, looked – and saw that he was cold as cold – he had died, little mother, Gorshkov had suddenly died, as if smitten by a thunderbolt! And what he died of – God alone knows. It so overwhelmed me, Varenka, that I still can't get over it even now. It's simply impossible to believe that a man can die with so little fuss. What a poor miserable devil that Gorshkov was! Oh, what a fate, what a fate! His wife was in tears, fairly terrified out of her wits. The girl has gone to hide in a corner somewhere. There's a terrible commotion in their room; a forensic investigation is going to be carried out... I don't know all the details for certain. But I'm sorry for them, oh so sorry! It's so sad to think that one really can have no knowledge of the day or the hour... One will die just like that, for no reason...

Your

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

September 19

Varvara Alekseyevna, Dear Madam,

I hasten to inform you, my friend, that Ratazyayev has found me work with a certain author. Someone came to see him with a great thick manuscript – praise be to God, it's a lot of work. The only thing is that it's so illegibly written that I can't seem to make much sense of it... They've agreed to pay me forty copecks per printer's sheet. I'm telling you this, my dear, so you will know that we shall now have some extra money. Well, and now goodbye, little mother. I must set straight to work.

Your faithful friend,

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

September 23

Makar Alekseyevich, my dear friend,

It's three days now since I wrote anything to you – but I have had a lot, a lot of troubles, a lot of anxiety.

The day before yesterday Bykov came to see me. I was alone, Fedora had gone off somewhere. I opened the door to him, and was so terrified when I saw him that I could not move from the spot. I could feel myself going pale. He came in as he usually does, with his loud laughter, took a chair and sat down. For a long time I could not summon my wits together; in the end I sat down in the corner with my work. Soon he stopped laughing. I think my appearance shocked him. I have become very thin of late; my cheeks and eyes have grown sunken, and I was as white as a sheet... it would really be quite difficult for someone who had known me a year ago to recognize me now. He looked at me long and fixedly, and then finally cheered up again. He said something or other; I don't remember what I said in reply, but he burst out laughing again. He sat there in my room for a whole hour, talked to me for a long time, asking me about something. Finally, before taking his leave of me, he took me by the hand and said (these were his exact words): 'Varvara Alekseyevna! Between you and me, Anna Fyodorovna, your relative and my intimate friend and companion, is a very nasty piece of work.' (Here he also used an indecent word to refer to her.) 'She also led your female cousin astray, and

ruined you. As regards myself, I behaved like a cad in that affair, too – but then, it happens every day.’ At that point he fairly chortled with laughter. Then he commented that he was no master of eloquence, that he had already told me the most important things which ought to be explained to me and about which the obligations of decency forbade him to remain silent, and that he would proceed to the remaining matters in brief terms only. Here he announced to me that he sought my hand in marriage, that he considered it his duty to restore to me my honour, that he was rich, that after the wedding he would take me away to his village in the steppes, that he wanted to go hare-coursing there; that he would never come back to St Petersburg again, because it was a vile city, that in it he had, as he put it, a ‘no-good nephew’ whom he had sworn to deprive of his inheritance, and that it was for this very reason – that of acquiring some lawful inheritors – that he sought my hand, this being the main purpose of his suit. Then he observed that I was living in very straitened circumstances, that it was no wonder I was ill, living in such a hovel, predicted that I would inevitably die if I were to remain there even one month longer, said that rented accommodation in St Petersburg was vile, and finally asked me if there was anything I wanted.

I was so shocked by his proposal that – I don’t know why – I burst into tears. He interpreted this as a sign of gratitude and told me that he had always been convinced I was a goodhearted, sensitive and educated woman, but that he had not been able to bring himself to take this step until he had made detailed enquiries as to my present behaviour. Then he enquired about you, said he had heard all about you, that you were a man of decent principles, that he for his part did not want to be in your debt and asked if five hundred rubles would suffice to pay you for all you had done for me. When I explained to him that what you had done for me could never be paid for in money, he told me that that was just a lot of romantic nonsense, that I was young and read too many poems and novels, that novels were the ruin of young girls, that books were harmful to morality and that he could not endure books of any kind; he advised me to wait until I was his age before making judgements about people. ‘Then you’ll have some idea,’ he added. Then he told me to think his proposal over carefully, that he would find it very displeasing were I to take such an important step rashly, added that rashness and impulsiveness could be the ruin of inexperienced youth, but that he greatly desired a favourable reply from me, and that if such a reply were not forthcoming he would be compelled to marry a merchant’s daughter in Moscow, because, he said, ‘I have sworn to deprive that no-good nephew of mine of his inheritance.’ He forced me to accept the five hundred rubles – isweet-money’, as he put it; he said that in the country I would ‘grow as round as a doughnut’, that in his house I would live in clover, that he had a fearful amount of business to attend to just now, that he trudged around all day seeing to it and that he had dropped in to see me between two appointments. Then he left. I thought for a long time, I redianded on a great many things and went through agonies of indecision as I did so, my friend; and at last I made up my mind. My friend, I am going to marry him. I must accept his proposal. If there is anyone who can save me from my shame, restore to me my honourable reputation, and rescue me from poverty, deprivation and unhappiness, it is him, and him alone. What more can I expect from the future, what more can I ask of fate? Fedora says one mustn’t sacrifice one’s happiness. ‘What is happiness in a case like this?’ she says. At any rate, I can’t see another way forward for myself, my precious friend. What would I do? I have ruined my health with work as it is; I cannot work all the time. Become a serving-maid? I would die of misery, and in any case I’d be no good to anyone. I’m sickly by nature, and so I’ll always be a burden to others. Of course, I know I’m not exactly going to paradise now, but what else can I do? What choice do I have?

I have not asked you for advice. I wanted to think the matter over by myself. The decision you have just read is unalterable, and I am going to tell Bykov of it forthwith – he is pressing me to make a final decision even as it is. He says his business will not wait, he has to leave town, and he can’t postpone it just because of trivia. God knows whether I will be happy, my fate is in His holy, ineffable power, but I have made up my mind. Bykov is said to be a kind man; he will respect me; perhaps I will respect him, too. What more can be expected of our marriage?

I shall keep you informed of everything, Makar Alekseyevich. I am certain that you will understand the full extent of my anguish. Do not seek to deflect me from my intention. Your exertions will be in vain. Try to weigh over in your own

heart all the factors that have prompted me to act in this fashion. I was very anxious at first, but now I am calmer. What lies ahead I do not know. What will be, will be; as God decides!...

Bykov has arrived; I am leaving this letter unfinished. There was much more which I wanted to tell you. Bykov is in the room!

V. D.

September 23

Varvara Alekseyevna, little mother!

I hasten to reply to you, little mother; I hasten to tell you, little mother, that I am amazed. This is somehow all wrong... We buried Gorshkov yesterday. Yes, it is right, Varenka, it is right; Bykov has acted honourably; only you are agreeing to his proposal, my darling. Of course, God is will's in all things; it is right, it must unquestionably be right –that is to say, God's will must be in this; and the providence of the Heavenly Creator is, of course, blessed and unfathomable, and human fates, too – they are the same. And you have the sympathy of Fedora, too. Of course, now you will be happy, little mother, you will have a sufficiency of everything, my little dove, my little treasure, my beloved, my little angel – only Varenka, why are you doing it so quickly?... Yes, business... Mr Bykov has business to attend to – of course, who hasn't? he is just as likely to have business to attend to as the next person... I saw him as he was leaving the house after seeing you. He's a fine figure of a man, a fine figure of a man; even a very fine figure of a man. It's just that it somehow seems all wrong, it's not really to do with his being a fine figure of a man but rather with the fact that I'm not myself now. It's just that how are we going to write letters to each other now? And I, how am I going to manage alone? My little angel, I'm weighing it all over, all of what you have written to me in your letter; I am weighing them all over in my heart, the reasons you give. I had just finished copying the twentieth printer's sheet, and all the while these happenings had been taking place! Little mother, I mean, here you are setting off on a journey – you'll need to buy various items, like shoes and a dress, and it just so happens that I know of a shop in Gorokhovaya Street; you remember the one – I described it to you before. But no! How can you, little mother, what are you thinking of? I mean, you can't go just now – it's quite impossible, quite out of the question. I mean, you will need to do a great deal of shopping and arrange for a carriage. What's more, the weather is bad just now; just look out of your window – the rain's simply pouring down, and it's such a wetting rain, and you'll... you'll get so cold, my little angel; your little heart will get cold! I mean, you're afraid of strangers, yet here you are setting off with this man. And who will I have once you are gone? I know that Fedora says that great happiness awaits you... but she's an ungovernable woman and she wants to ruin me. Will you be at the all-night service tonight, little mother? I would go merely in order to look at you. It's true, little mother, it's perfectly true that you're an educated woman, virtuous and sensitive – it's just that he'd do better to marry the merchant's daughter! What do you think, little mother? Don't you think that's what he ought to do? As soon as it gets dark I shall look in and see you for a little while, my Varenka. It's getting dark early today, and I shall look in. Little mother, I shall come and see you for a little while today without fail. You'll be waiting for Bykov to arrive now, but when he leaves, then... Just wait, little mother, and I shall look in...

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

September 27

Makar Alekseyevich, my friend,

Mr Bykov has said that I must have three dozen linen chemises. So I must find seamstresses to make at least two dozen as quickly as possible, and we have very little time. Mr Bykov keeps losing his temper, saying that I am making far too much of a fuss about 'these rags'. Our wedding is in five days' time, and we are to travel the day after. Mr Bykov is in

a hurry, he says we mustn't waste so much time on nonsense. I am worn out by all my worries, and can hardly stay on my feet. There is a terrible amount of business to attend to, and I really think it would have been better if this had never come to pass. What is more: we don't have enough silk or lace, so I shall have to buy some, as Mr Bykov says he doesn't want his wife to go around looking like a kitchenmaid, and that I really must 'wipe those landowners' wives' noses for them'. That's how he puts it. So I wonder, Makar Alekseyevich, if you could please go and see Madame Chiffon on Gorokhovaya Street and ask her a) to send us some seamstresses and b) to make the effort and come and see us herself. I am unwell today. It's so cold in our new apartment, and everything is in such terrible chaos. Mr Bykov's aunt is so old that she is only barely alive. I am afraid she may die before we manage to get away, but Mr Bykov says it is nothing, she will get over it. Everything in our house is in a dreadful state of turmoil. Mr Bykov is not living on the premises, and so the servants have all gone off, God knows where. Sometimes there is only Fedora to attend to our needs: Mr Bykov's valet, who looks after everything, has been missing for three days now. Mr Bykov looks in every morning; he's always in a bad temper and yesterday he administered a beating to the house manager, as a result of which he got into trouble with the police... There has been no one to deliver my letters to you. I am sending this by regular mail. Oh yes! I almost forgot the most important thing. Please tell Madame Chiffon she must change the silk and match it with the pattern we chose yesterday; tell her she must come and show me the new silk she has selected. And tell her also that I have given some thought to the *canezou*;* that it needs to be crocheted. And in addition: the letters of the monograms on the handkerchiefs must be done in *tambour à broder*, do you hear? *Tambour*, and not satin-stitch. See you don't forget it is to be *tambour*! Oh, and there's something else I'd almost forgotten: please, for the love of God, tell her that the leaves on the cape are to be sewn in relief, and the tendrils and thorns in *cordonnnet*, and then the collar is to be done in lace or wide furbelows. Please make sure you tell her this, Makar Alekseyevich.

Your

V. D.

PS I feel so guilty about troubling you with my errands. It was only the other day that you spent the whole morning running around for my sake. But what can I do? The house is in chaos, and I am unwell. So please don't be annoyed with me, Makar Alekseyevich. I'm so depressed! Oh, what will become of me, my friend, my dear, good Makar Alekseyevich? I'm afraid to look into the future. I have a certain premonition of what will happen, and am living in a kind of daze.

PPS Please for the love of God, my friend, don't forget any of what I have told you in this letter. I'm so afraid you may get it wrong. Remember: *tambour à broder*, not satin-stitch.

V. D.

Septembe 27

Varvara Alekseyevna, Dear Madam,

I have zealously completed all your errands. Madame Chiffon said she had already had the idea of doing the letters in *tambour*; she said it's more suitable, or something – I don't really know, I didn't understand properly. Oh yes: you wrote something in your letter about the furbelows, and she, too, said something about it. The only thing is, little mother, that I've forgotten what it was. All I remember is that she said an awful lot – the revolting woman! What was it, now? Oh, she'll tell you herself what it was. I'm absolutely exhausted, little mother. I didn't go in to the office today. But don't despair, little mother – I am prepared to go round all the stores for the sake of your peace of mind. You write that you are afraid to look into the future. Well, at seven o'clock this evening all will be revealed to you. Madame Chiffon herself will call on you in person. So don't despair; have hope, little mother; everything may yet work out for the best – just you wait. For some reason I keep seeing those accursed furbelows – oh I can't stand them, those furbelows, furbelows! I would have dropped in to see you, little angel, I would have, honestly I would; in fact, I've been up to the gates of your house a couple of times now. But Bykov is always there! What I mean is that Mr Bykov is such a bad-tempered fellow, so it would

not be the right thing to do... Well, it doesn't matter!

Your

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

September 28

Makar Alekseyevich, Sir,

Please, for the love of God, go and see the jeweller and tell him not to make the pearl and emerald earrings. Mr Bykov says it's too extravagant, it will cost too much. he is in a bad mood; he says that it is hurting his pocket enough as it is, and that we are robbing him; and yesterday he said that if he had known there would be all this expense he would never have agreed to marry me in the first place. He says that as soon as the wedding is over we are going away – there are to be no guests, that I needn't expect any dancing or la-di-daing, and that Christmas is still a long way off. That is the way he talks! But, as God's my witness, I don't need all these things. It's Mr Bykov who ordered them. I don't dare to answer him back: he's so hot-tempered. What is to become of me?

V. D.

September 28

Varvara Alekseyevna, my little dove,

I – what I mean is, the jeweller said it's all right; I was going to begin by telling you that I've been taken ill and can't get out of bed. I would have to go and catch a cold now, at such a busy time when there are so many urgent things to be seen to, the devil take it! I am also writing to inform you that, to complete my store of misfortune, His Excellency has flown off the handle – he lost his temper with Yemelyan Ivanovich, too, and shouted at him, so that the poor fellow was worried nearly to death. So you see, I am keeping you informed of everything. I wanted to tell you something else, too, but I'm afraid of causing you too much trouble. After all, little mother, I'm just a simple, stupid fellow, I just write whatever comes into my head, and you might very well not wish to – well, it doesn't matter!

Your

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

September 29

Varvara Alekseyevna, my darling!

I saw Fedora today, my little dove. She said you are getting married tomorrow, that the day after you are going away and that Mr Bykov is already hiring the horses. I have already informed you of His Excellency's behaviour, little mother. Oh, there is something else: I have checked the bills from the shop in Gorokhovaya Street; they are all correct, but the things are all very expensive. So why is it you at whom Mr Bykov lets fly his bad temper? Well, be happy, little mother! I am glad; yes, and I will go on being glad, as long as you are happy. I would come to the church service, little mother, but I can't, I have lumbago. I am still worried about our letters: who will deliver them for us now, little mother? Yes! You have been a friend and protector to Fedora, my darling. That is a good deed that you have done, my friend; that is a very good deed that you have done. A good deed! And for each of your good deeds the Lord will bless you. Good deeds do not go unrewarded, and virtue will sooner or later be adorned with the crown of divine justice. Little mother! There is much that I would like to write you – I could spend each and every hour, each and every minute of the day just writing and writing to you! I still have one of your books, *Tales of Belkin*. You know, little mother, I would like to ask you to let me keep it – make me a present of it, my little dove. It's not even that I feel like reading it so much just now. But you know yourself how it is, little mother: winter is approaching, the evenings will be long, one will be sad, and then one will feel

like reading. I am going to move out of my lodging into your old apartment and rent it together with Fedora. I would not part from that honest woman now for anything in the world; what's more, she's such a hard worker. I made a careful inspection of your empty apartment yesterday. Your lace-frame there, and your sewing on it, have not been touched: they are in the corner. I examined your sewing. There were still one or two scraps of cloth lying about. You had begun to wind some of your thread round one of my miserable letters. In the little bureau I found a sheet of paper with the words 'Makar Alekseyevich, Sir, I am in a hurry' on it – nothing more. Someone had evidently interrupted you just as you were getting to the most interesting part. Your little bed still stands in the corner, behind the screen... My little dove!!! Well, goodbye, goodbye; for the love of God, write me some reply to this miserable letter as soon as you are able.

MAKAR DEVUSHKIN

September 30

Makar Alekseyevich, my precious friend!

It is all done! My lot is cast; I have no knowledge of what it is to be, but I am obedient to the Lord's will. Tomorrow we leave. I bid you goodbye for the last time, my precious one, my friend, my benefactor, my darling! Don't grieve for me, live happily, remember me, and may God's blessing descend on you! I shall remember you often in my thoughts and in my prayers. At last this time is finished! I take into my new life little that is joyful from my memories of the past; all the more precious, then, will be my memory of you, all the more precious will you be to my heart. You are my only friend; you are the only person here who has loved me. I saw it all, I know how you loved me! One smile from me was enough to make you happy, one line of my handwriting. Now you will have to learn how to live without me. How will you manage alone here? Who will you have when I am gone, my good, precious, only friend? I am leaving you the book, my lace-frame, the letter I began, did not write; when you look at those lines, you must imagine the words you would like to hear me say or have me write, all the things I would like to write to you; and what would I not write to you now! Remember your poor Varenka, who loved you so hard. All your letters are at Fedora's, in the top drawer of the chest-of-drawers. You write that you are ill, and Mr Bykov will not let me go out anywhere today. I will write to you, my friend, I promise I will, but God alone knows what may happen. So let us say goodbye for ever, my friend, my sweet, my darling –for ever!... Oh, how I would hug you if you were here! Goodbye, my friend, goodbye, goodbye. Live happily; be well. I shall pray for you always. Oh, how sad I am, how utterly my soul is oppressed. Mr Bykov is calling me. Your eternally loving

v.

PS My soul is so full now, so full of tears... My tears are choking me, breaking me. Farewell.

God, how sad!

Remember, remember your poor Varenka!

Little mother, Varenka, my little dove, my precious! You are going, you are being taken away! I would rather have the heart torn from my breast than have you wrested from me in this fashion! How can you do this? I mean, you are weeping and yet you are going! I have just received a wretched little letter from you, all smudged with tears. From your letter it appears that you don't want to go; that you are being taken away by force; that you are sorry for me; that you love me! What will your life be like now, and with whom will you be spending it? Your little heart will be so sad, so sick and cold in this place you are going to. Anguish will suck it dry, sadness will split it in two. You will die there, they will put you to rest in the damp earth; there will be no one to shed a tear for you there! Mr Bykov will be off courting hares all the time... Oh, little mother, little mother! Why have you decided to do this, how could you have decided to take such a step? What have you done, what have you done, what have you done to yourself? I mean, they will send you to the grave

there; they will wear you out with work, my little angel. I mean, you are as weak as a feather, little mother. And where was I? Where were my eyes, fool that I am? How could I not have seen that the child was talking nonsense because her brain was affected by fever? When what I should have done was simply to – but no, fool that I was, I thought nothing, I saw nothing, as though that were the right thing to do, as though it had nothing to do with me; I even went out looking for furbelows... No, Varenka, I will get out of bed; by tomorrow, perhaps, I will be better, and then I will get up!... I will throw myself under the wheels of your carriage, little mother! I won't let you go away! No! What is this, after all? By what right is all this taking place? I shall leave with you; I shall run after your carriage, if you won't take me with you, I shall run until I am exhausted, until there is no breath left in my body. Have you any idea of what it is like where you are going, little mother? Perhaps you haven't; well, I can tell you! There there is the steppe, my dear, the steppe, the bare steppe; as bare as the palm of my hand! There there are callous peasant women, uneducated muzhiks, drunkards. There by this time of the year the leaves have fallen from the trees, it rains all the time, it is cold – and that is where you are going! Well, Mr Bykov will have something to keep him busy there: he'll be coursing his hares; but what will you do? Perhaps you want to be a landowner's wife, little mother? But my little angel! Take a look at-yourself and tell me if you think you look like a landowner's wife!... Who ever heard of such a thing, Varenka? To whom am I going to write my letters, little mother? Yes, think about that, little mother – ask yourself: 'Who's he going to write his letters to?' Who am I going to call 'little mother'? Who will I be able to call by that affectionate name? How will I ever find you once you are gone, my little angel? I will die, Varenka, I will surely die; my heart will not survive such a misfortune! I have loved you like God's daylight, I have loved you like my own daughter, I have loved everything about you, little mother, my darling! I have lived for you alone! I have worked, copied documents, walked, strolled, and conveyed to you my observations in the form of friendly letters, all because you, little mother, have been living here, opposite me, near me. Perhaps you weren't aware of that, but it was true all the same! Yes, listen, little mother, just think, my dear little dove, how can it be that you shall leave us? My darling, I mean, it is out of the question for you to leave, it is impossible; there is simply not the slightest possibility of such a thing! I mean, look, it is raining, and you are weak, you will catch cold. Your carriage will get wet inside; it will indubitably get wet inside. As soon as you get past the city boundary it will break down; it will break down as sure as eggs are eggs. The carriages they make here in St Petersburg are hopeless! I know those carriage-makers, every one of them; all they do is produce models, toys – it's not solid workmanship. I swear to you, it's not solid. I will go down on my knees to Mr Bykov, little mother; I will explain everything to him, everything! And you, too, little mother, you must explain to him; explain it to him by force of reason! Tell him that you are staying here, and that it's out of the question for you to go!... Oh, why couldn't he have married that Moscow merchant's daughter? That's what he ought to have done. A merchant's daughter would have suited him better, better by far; I don't need to be told why! And I would have kept you here with me. What is he to you anyway, this Bykov? What's suddenly made him so attractive to you? Perhaps it's because he's forever buying you furbelows, perhaps that's why? But I mean, what are furbelows? What good are they? I mean to say, little mother, they're just rubbish! It's a question of a man's life, and yet here you are, little mother, looking for furbelows – for rags! That is what they are, little mother – rags. Look, as soon as I get the next instalment of my salary I'll buy you some furbelows; I will, little mother; I know the very shop; just give me until I get the next bit of my salary, Varenka! Oh, Lord, Lord! So you really are going away into the steppe with Mr Bykov, and you're never coming back! Oh, little mother!... No, you must write to me again, write me another little letter about it all; and when you have finished your journey, you must write to me from there. Otherwise, my heavenly angel, this will be my last letter; and, I mean, it's impossible that this letter should be my last. I mean, how can it be, so suddenly, my last? No, I will write, and you will write... Otherwise the style I'm developing now won't... Oh, my darling, what is style? I mean, I don't even know what I'm writing, I've absolutely no idea, I know nothing of it, I read none of it over, I never correct my style, I write only in order to write, only in order to write as much as possible to you... My little dove, my darling, my little mother!